

# No easy fixes: Government workers' perception of policy (in) coherence in the implementation of the Post-2015 agenda in Mexico

Mar Moure<sup>a,c,\*</sup>, Simone Sandholz<sup>a</sup>, Mia Wannevitz<sup>b</sup>, Matthias Garschagen<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> United Nations University, Institute of Environment and Human Security, UN Campus, Platz der Vereinten Nationen 1, 53113 Bonn, Germany

<sup>b</sup> Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (LMU), Department of Geography, Lehr- und Forschungseinheit Mensch-Umwelt-Beziehungen, Luisenstraße 37, 80333 Munich, Germany

<sup>c</sup> Department of Food and Resource Economics, University of Copenhagen, Rolighedsvej 23, DK-1958, Denmark

## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Policy coherence for sustainable development  
Typology  
Paris Agreement  
SDGs  
Sendai Framework  
New Urban Agenda

## ABSTRACT

The Paris Agreement, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Framework and the New Urban Agenda share a vision of global sustainable development, with several overlapping goals and targets. However, these agendas are often treated along sectoral boundaries leading to highly branched implementation. Underusing potential synergies is not only a burden for governments due to the costs of redundancies and inefficiency but can also hinder collective goals and lead to inter-agenda trade-offs. Despite growing attention on policy coherence in research and policy, existing literature fails to explain why it is so hard to achieve despite widespread recognition of its theoretical value. Based on a literature review and fieldwork in Mexico, our research focuses on the perception of the people in charge of operationalizing the agendas. We develop a typology of non-monetary costs and benefits that encompasses the alternative scenarios of 1) increased coherence in the implementation of the agendas in Mexico and 2) a business-as-usual scenario. Results challenge the dominant approach that focuses on binary policy coherence/incoherence analysis, by identifying also perceived benefits of incoherence and costs of building coherence. They also highlight the importance of often overlooked barriers to cross-sectoral and cross-scalar collaboration driven by institutional arrangements and work culture. The resulting typology differentiates drivers and manifestations of (in)coherence from their impacts on institutions and society. From this, we derive that a scenario of increased coherence in the implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda represents net gains to society and only relative losses to institutions, once the current costs of incoherence are discounted. However, the process of building policy coherence is beyond easy fixes, requiring structural change. Otherwise, institutions risk falling into a cosmetic level of coherence that is both costly and ineffective.

## 1. Introduction

The year 2015 was remarkable in the history of international cooperation. Various communities of thought and practice harnessed

\* Corresponding author at: Department of Food and Resource Economics, Environment and Natural Resources, Rolighedsvej 23, 1958 Frederiksberg C, Denmark.

E-mail address: [marmoure@ifro.ku.dk](mailto:marmoure@ifro.ku.dk) (M. Moure).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.crm.2020.100270>

Received 2 September 2020; Received in revised form 15 December 2020; Accepted 20 December 2020

Available online 2 January 2021

2212-0963/© 2021 The Authors. Published by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

a shared impetus of political will, which resulted in a cohort of international agreements. Four of the resulting documents are the Paris Climate Agreement (PA), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), and the New Urban Agenda (NUA). Although thematically different, these documents –which we will refer to as the Post-2015 Agenda– are unified in a shared vision of global sustainable development that is just, inclusive and safe for people and the planet while also accounting for future impacts of current megatrends such as climate change and urbanization.

Although acknowledged as complementary, the agendas are in practice often treated along sectoral boundaries, leading to highly branched governance structures, funding, and implementing legislation (UNDRR, 2020). The focal points to the different agendas at national level tend to be housed in different ministries and to develop their own data collection systems and reporting lines (Spangenberg, 2016; Stafford-Smith et al., 2017). Different commitments, budgets and priorities at different administrative levels and between respective actors involved in policy planning, implementation and reporting pose a challenge to the alignment of policies and actions (Hsu et al., 2017; Rasul, 2016). Underusing the synergies between the agendas not only represents a burden for governments because of redundancies and duplicated operative costs but can also hinder collective goals and lead to contradictory outcomes (cf. Wisner, 2020), for instance, when advancing one agenda creates a problem of concern to a different one.

Rising concerns about the inefficiency and potential drawbacks of fragmented implementation of the agendas has led to a surge in the policy coherence approach to help facilitate the streamlining of the Post-2015 Agenda efforts (Verschaeve et al., 2016) in sight of the fast-approaching 2030 target date. In this particular context, the term ‘agenda coherence’ was coined to designate “the appropriate, concerted approach of government actors on all levels and in all sectors for implementing the global Post-2015 Agenda in order to achieve their goals more effectively and more efficiently”<sup>1</sup>. Definitions usually include the notions of *vertical coherence*, that is, the effective articulation of objectives, policies, and resources from international frameworks to the local level, as well as *horizontal coherence*, which relates to linking implementation of the different framework goals through collaboration of actors and coordination of activities (GNDR, 2020). Agenda coherence builds on the theoretical and conceptual developments in the field of Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) promoted by the OECD since the 1990s (OECD, 2016), but expands the scope from sustainable development in and across SDGs (Nshimbi, 2019), to the emerging consideration of cross-cutting issues between agendas (OECD, 2020; UNESCAP, 2018). More explicitly, it engages in the programmatic areas of implementation and reporting at domestic level rather than focusing on aid donor governance, a core issue in the PCD literature (Häbel, 2020). While focusing on agenda coherence, our research also draws from PCDs understanding of a whole of government approach to sustainability (Koff et al., 2020), and is positioned to contribute to current debates within this scholarly body.

Despite the recentness in the agreement of these global agendas, interest in this field is strong and has been growing. Research and policy publications have covered different levels of analysis, including intra-agenda coherence between goals and targets of the same agenda, inter-agenda coherence between two or more agendas (e.g. nexus approaches), and coherence between international agendas and national or sub-national policies.

Among the examples of intra-agenda coherence studies, the issue of determining synergies and trade-offs in the implementation of the SDGs in particular has received much attention (see for example: Collste et al., 2017; Kroll et al., 2019; Nilsson and Weitz, 2019) as well as coherence within Paris Agreement climate change mitigation and adaptation policies (Di Gregorio et al., 2017). Inter-agenda coherence has been explored, inter alia, by Sandoval and Sarmiento (2018) who contrasted NAU country pledges and SFDRR targets in Latin America; by Antwi-Agyei et al. (2018), who looked at alignments between the SDGs and the Paris Agreement NDCs in West Africa, and Janetschek and Iacobuta (2019) also focusing on these last two agendas but at the global level. Koff's study in Mexico (2021) unveils the tensions between environmental regulation and SDGs implementation in mining. Other publications have a sectoral focus that is explored across agendas, e.g. on risk reduction (cf. Sarmiento, 2018; Wisner, 2020), risk reduction in urban areas (Etinay et al., 2018), or on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction across agendas (Mysiak et al., 2018; Wamsler and Johannessen, 2020). On the process of coherence-building between global agendas and national strategies, Fourie (2018) researched the context of South Africa, partly addressing the potentials of coherence between the National Development Strategy and the SDGs; Koff et al. (2020) looked at coherence across spatial scales in the case of Mexican protected areas; Francis and Nair (2020) on coherence between SDGs and the tourism sector in the Bahamas, and Zinggrebe (2018) on coherence between SDGs, Aichi targets and national biodiversity conservation policies in Peru.

Despite these examples, however, there is a dearth of research that considers coherence among several Post-2015 Agenda documents and their implementation within national and sub-national contexts. Moreover, the vast majority of studies compare at a policy document level without considering actual implementation of such policies and the implications of establishing coherence for those who are responsible for the implementation. Incomplete knowledge of the actual gains and losses of current practices and the potentialities of agenda coherence appears to be one factor preventing countries from translating their discursive commitments into full-fledged implementation (c.f. Kanie et al., 2019; Wamsler and Johannessen, 2020). Coherence literature also shows that motivational (c.f. Valensisi and Karingi, 2016; Verschaeve et al., 2016; Siders, 2016), organizational (Antwi-Agyei et al., 2018; Rees et al., 2018; Stafford-Smith et al., 2017; Weichselgartner and Pigeon, 2015) and socio-normative (Koff et al., 2020; Koff and Maganda, 2016) factors play an important role in the (in)coherent implementation of policies, although typical policy coherence studies rarely go beyond identifying bottlenecks as a locus in a process. Although a purely procedural coherence approach provides answers as to how policies can be made more coherent by identifying where to adjust, it fails to explain why it is in reality so hard to achieve. This is despite the theoretical appeal of coherence and the virtually unanimous recognition that it would be the preferred state of affairs. In

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gidrm.net/en/glossary>

fact, literature almost exclusively focuses on the benefits of coherence while only rarely mentioning benefits derived from incoherence (e.g. having clear institutional mandates and tasks) (Sandholz et al., 2020), despite these being potentially more useful for describing the status quo. The normative notion of the agendas and the one-sided view of coherence as exclusively good have apparently led to a lack of critical reflections on coherence, including about its implementation at local level.

In order to contribute to closing these knowledge gaps, our research focuses on the perceptions of those in charge of operationalizing these agendas regarding agenda coherence. We take Mexico as a case study, a country that has spearheaded policy coherence efforts with respect to the agendas but where materializing the envisioned advances remain challenging. Our main research questions are:

- 1) Do government workers perceive the thematic areas of the Post-2015 Agenda as being complementary and relevant to their own obligations?
- 2) What are government workers' perceptions of the costs and benefits of policy (in)coherence regarding the Post-2015 Agenda, and how do these costs and benefits manifest?
- 3) What factors do government workers identify as drivers of policy incoherence?
- 4) Who do government workers perceive as bearing the costs or reaping the benefits of policy (in)coherence?

Drawing from their experiences in public service work, we then develop a typology of non-monetary costs and benefits that encompasses the alternative scenarios of 1) a more coherent implementation of the agendas in Mexico and 2) a business-as-usual scenario. The next chapter provides an overview of the landscape of institutions dealing with the Post-2015 Agenda in Mexico and sketches relevant milestones for policy coherence in the evolution of those institutions' work foci. Chapter 3 presents the materials and methods employed in this study and their limitations. The organization of the results (Chapter 4) in four sub-chapters corresponds to each of the research questions above, which are in turn discussed in Chapter 5. Finally, conclusions and future research outlook are synthesized in Chapter 6.

## 2. Case study: Mexico

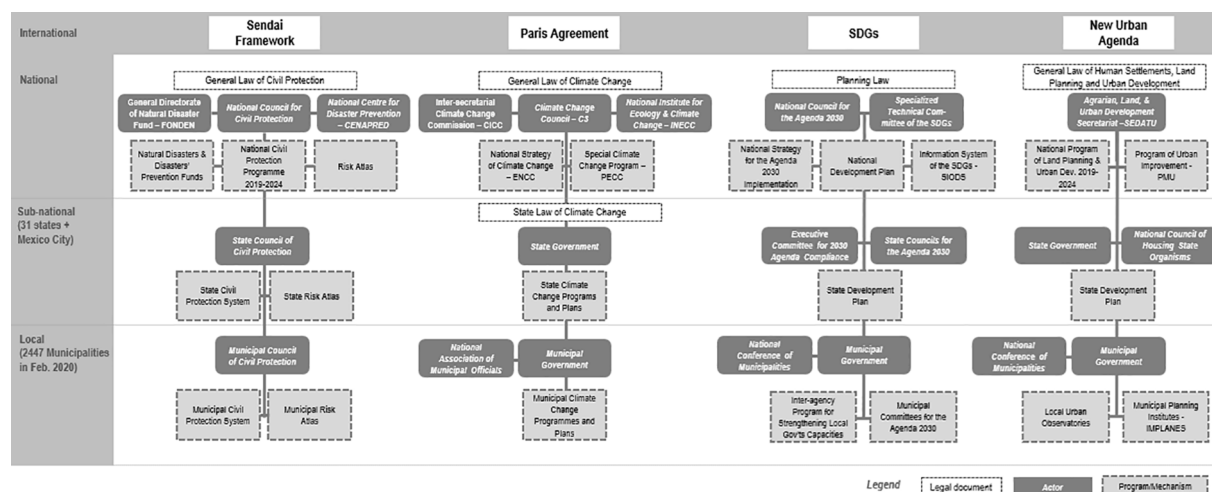
### 2.1. Country background

Mexico is a federal republic with 31 states plus the district of Mexico City. A new president is elected every six years, which generally entails the renewal of key ministerial positions as well as other federal government personnel. Since 2018, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador leads a new administration. The institutions charged as national focal points or custodian agencies for the agendas are the National Institute of Ecology and Climate Change (INECC) and the Ministry of Environment (SEMARNAT) for developing the strategic plans for the Paris Agreement commitments; the Office of the Presidency (OPR) for the SDGs (Gobierno de México, 2019); the National System of Civil Protection (SINAPROC) and the National Center for Disaster Prevention (CENAPRED) for the Sendai Framework; and the Secretary of Agrarian, Land and Urban Development (SEDATU) for Habitat III (the New Urban Agenda). Key elements of the governance system of the Post-2015 Agenda are synthesized in Fig. 1.

Mexico is not only an emerging economy, but also an actively engaged multilateral actor that maintained a high profile in the process leading to the Post-2015 Agenda, and has remained engaged since. For example, Mexico hosted important high-level events such as the Conference of the Parties on Climate Change (COP16) in 2010, the regional meeting of the New Urban Agenda in 2016, and the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2017. It has also publicly proclaimed the will to advance policy coherence at international fora. For instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has highlighted its commitment to treating Disaster Risk Reduction as an integral part of a macro strategy that seeks "coherence and consistency among the relevant processes in the areas of climate change, sustainable development, humanitarian affairs and international cooperation".<sup>2</sup>

At a domestic level, the Mexican government has created and modified laws, policies and guidelines in order to have a normative framework conducive to the inclusion of transversal goals from multiple agendas. For example, the Planning Law (*Ley de Planeación*) was reformed in 2018 to consider provisions towards the achievements of the SDGs targets for 2030 (DOF, 2018), albeit the amendment is formulated as a non-mandatory act. It has re-structured some ministerial mandates, functions and organizational arrangements in the pursuit of improved cross-sectoral alignment (e.g. the creation of the National Council of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development) (SRE, 2017). The government has also promoted and made visible good practices that foster coherence, piloting projects and implementing other initiatives at a larger scale (e.g. ARISE partnership). Such changes are catalyzed by a series of targeted studies commissioned by governmental agencies to provide evidence, for instance, of the co-benefits between the SDGs and the Nationally Determined Contributions of the Paris Agreement (Gioutsos and Ochs, 2019), the co-benefits between the SDGs and the SFDRR (Mier y Terán Ruesga and Ramírez Moreno, 2019), or of how to link SDGs targets to the federal budget (SHCP, 2017). However, despite the advancements made and the manifested will to improve, there are still major challenges for policy coherence in the country (Guerrero and Castañeda, 2020; Koff, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> <https://mision.sre.gob.mx/oi/index.php/areas-tematicas/desastres> consulted on 29.04.2019.



**Fig. 1.** Overview of Post-2015 Agenda framework of implementation in Mexico. Own elaboration from multiple sources (OECD, 2013; SEMARNAT-INECC, 2016; Gobierno de México, 2019; SEDATU, 2020).

## 2.2. Overview of institutions and policies linked to the Post-2015 Agenda

Climate Change and the environment have a convoluted history as topics of governmental concern in Mexico. Environmental issues fell within the authority of the health sector until the 1970s. Environmental degradation was perceived as solely affecting the private sphere (individual's health) and not as a threat to the country's development (Alfíe, 2016). In 1982, environmental concerns were appended to urban development in the newly created Secretariat of Urban Development and Ecology. This coupling corresponded to a punctual increase in social awareness about pollution and biodiversity loss following the environmental crisis in Mexico City and Metropolitan areas (Ibid). Subsequent institutional reconfigurations in the 1990s would see environmental issues contained within the Ministry of Social Development, until the SEMARNAT (Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources) was created in 2000, replacing the short-lived Secretariat of Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries. In the 21st century, there were strong efforts to make the environment a non-sectoral but transversal issue by including the SEMARNAT in all three cabinets of the executive branch. However, academics stressed the contradictions between progressively more coherent policy and reality, claiming most changes only occur "on paper" (Surasky, 2017). It was only in recent years that climate change started gaining traction as a key component of the environmental agenda, represented institutionally by the creation of the National Institute of Ecology and Climate Change (INECC) in 2001, which expanded its predecessor, the National Institute of Ecology.

Disaster Risk Management in Mexico has followed the shifting paradigms in the global DRR community, for instance, by increasingly fostering local stewardship and prevention. For instance, since the 80s the SINAPROC started a decentralization process of the Civil Protection system that would devolve faculties from Mexico City to the local levels. Presently, municipalities are officially in charge of preventing and responding to disasters. In practice, however, this responsibility has not been met since most municipalities lack basic resources and capacities for civil protection, relying on state and federal services instead (Ruiz-Rivera and Lucatello, 2017). One way to support local governments in identifying and managing risks and for urban planning has been the project to create Risk Atlases –cartographic assessments of risk-prone areas– at municipal scale, a colossal task considering that Mexico has 2,447 municipalities. By 2017, only 15% of municipalities were reported to have a Municipal Risk Atlas that adhered to national guidelines (Medina Barrios et al., 2017). Since the 90s, SINAPROC has recognized the importance of prevention in disaster risk management. With its creation in 1996, the National Fund for the Prevention of Natural Disasters (FONDEN) became a central source for reconstruction funding in the wake of disasters. Although FONDEN was complemented in 2006 with a budget account to invest in prevention (FOPREDEN), prevention has remained largely under-funded. The disparity is evident in annual budgetary allocations, with FOPREDEN's average budget being 32 times smaller than the FONDEN reconstruction program (World Bank, 2012). Not surprisingly, at the local level Civil Protection functions are still mostly limited to reacting to emergencies (Toscana Aparicio and Fernández Poncela, 2016).

Land planning and urban development are competencies of municipal governments. The new administration has pushed to make spatial planning a core tool of governmental planning, and has tasked the recently created ministry of SEDATU (in 2013) with articulating the mapping and zoning of the national territory in a census-like mission. Since this is still an unfinished process it is too soon to test its effects on policy planning and implementation, but so far this exercise has missed the opportunity of expanding the spatial planning tool to also include environmental zoning and risk mapping (i.e. Risk Atlases), tools which already exist but are typically confined to specific uses within their respective sectors. A study by Sandoval and Sarmiento (2018) looked through national reports of Latin American countries for Habitat III in order to determine what role (if any) disaster risk reduction played in urban planning. Mexico fell into the category of countries that did not mention the Sendai Framework or any of the targets in its report to Habitat III, despite having over 10 million people living in informal settlements –second only to Brazil–, a population group

particularly vulnerable to the impacts of natural hazards.

A so-called “foundational incoherence” in Latin American public policies is the disproportioned imbalance in favor of the economic pillar of sustainable development over its social and environmental counterparts, thus effectively propetuating the externalization of social and environmental costs (Surasky, 2017). In public programs in Mexico, poverty reduction has historically been the *de facto* aim of sustainable development, whereas other dimensions of sustainability have played a much smaller role. In July 2019, the new administration released the National Development Plan 2019-2024 (PND), in which the strategic guidelines and priorities for the government are set for the upcoming years. The role of the state in generating “coherent public policies and articulating national objectives” was reaffirmed (Presidencia de la República de México, 2019: 10). At the core of the document’s proposal is the argument that focusing on poverty alleviation, reduction of inequalities, and fighting corruption and violence will improve collective wellbeing. While there is notable overlap between the content of the text and some socio-economic oriented SDGs targets (e.g. the phrase “leave no one behind” is picked up as a guiding line) there are no explicit references to the SDGs. Other than urban development and housing, none of the other thematic lines of the Post-2015 Agenda appear as top priorities. The term ‘climate change’ is completely absent in the document, and no specific proposals are made for the environment. Risk to natural hazards is only mentioned in the context of the National Reconstruction Program for people affected by the 2017 and 2018 earthquakes. Moreover, despite the recent reform to the Planning Law mentioned above, the PND does not venture beyond the year 2024 in planning or in setting a mid-term vision for the country’s commitments to the 2030 stock-take of the international agreements.

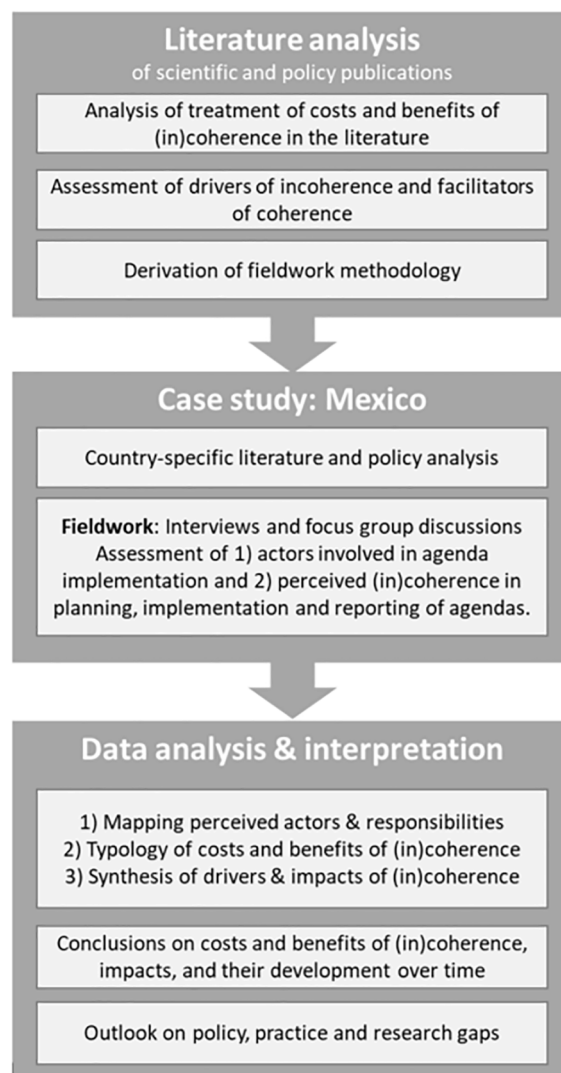


Fig. 2. Visual representation of the research design used.



### 3. Materials and methods

A combination of deductive and inductive methodology was chosen to dive into the novel research field of agenda coherence, where very few empirical studies or methodologies are available. Due to its explorative nature, the research focuses on providing an overview of key areas of (in)coherence, the root causes and challenges to overcome them, and the human experience in the process, captured by the experiences of the public servants involved. The research design followed an iterative approach that started with a literature analysis, examining the state of knowledge and evidence on policy coherence in general, followed by a more targeted review of scientific and grey literature regarding agenda implementation and governance in the country case (Fig. 2). The results of the desktop research together with expert feedback were the basis to develop the data collection tools used in the field.

Fieldwork was conducted in March 2019 at national, state and municipal level in the form of 13 expert interviews and 4 focus group discussions involving the participation of 55 stakeholders working at a variety of technical and political positions within 17 key institutions for the implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda (Appendix A). The choice of invited institutions aimed to strike a balance between primary institutions having a stake in the agendas (e.g. national focal points), and other institutions whose mandates overlap with more than one of the agenda objectives relevant because of planned or ongoing cross-sectoral initiatives. Separate interviews also included the views of local experts from academia or civil society whose professional work is relevant to the topics at hand. Because time and resource limitations, the municipal level is slightly under-represented in terms of number of local authorities interviewed compared to the federal and state levels. Contacts and appointments were facilitated by the Global Initiative on Disaster Risk Management (GIDRM) country team, an international program of the GIZ.

Two structured activities and one less-structured prompting phase were used to elicit the anecdotal evidence and perception of participants. Interviews began with an actor mapping exercise using Venn diagrams to assess perceived overlaps between the Paris Agreement, the SDGs, the Sendai Framework, and the New Urban Agenda, as well as perceived responsibilities towards the underlying thematic fields (climate change, sustainable development, risk, and urban development, respectively). Afterwards, participants were shown a matrix discerning between working areas of the Agendas (policy and planning, implementation as columns, and reporting and monitoring), and potential levels of manifested (in)coherence as rows (goals, measures, budget spending, staff and time, data and information, know-how, and any other aspect brought forward by the stakeholder). Depending on context and time availability, participants were asked to either fill the matrix or simply discuss the responses. The third phase consisted of more targeted prompting to elicit complementary anecdotal evidence in narrative form or to expand on relevant issues previously mentioned. Most encounters were recorded (prior to verbal consent of the participants), with the exception of large focus groups where recording was not practical. Notes were taken in every case.

The materials used for the activities, interview notes and partial recording transcripts served as primary data for the analysis. Using MAXQDA software (VERBI Software, 2019), transcripts and notes underwent multiple rounds of coding to create and then consolidate self-contained themes as sub-categories of the initial coding structure through a hybrid thematic analysis approach. This iterative process allowed for the refinement of categories beyond the original codebook by shifting, merging and deleting codes as distinctive qualities of the data emerged (Anderson et al., 2014). Recognizing “fuzzy boundaries” in the interpretation of the data, given the goal of identifying latent themes rather than semantic occurrence, we followed the technique of simultaneous coding which allows for the co-occurrence of codes in the same text segment (Saldana, 2012). Anecdote boxes, tables and graphics were used to synthesize and visualize results.

Participants were asked to speak not from their institutional roles, but as experienced witnesses of governmental efforts to implement the agendas. Findings, therefore, should be understood within their subjective value as a complement to the existing literature in the field. Participants were not given a definition of policy coherence but asked to interpret the concept after some prompting. They associated coherence to notions such as integration, alignment, coordination and cooperation, matching key concepts found in the literature (UNDRR, 2020). Because not all public servants are familiar with the names or content of the documents in the Post-2015 Agenda, we began sessions by providing a brief overview of these and thereafter used thematic fields (sustainable development, environmental risk, climate change, and urban policy) as a proxy for the specific agendas.

Participants in the study are granted anonymity. Results are not traced back to any specific individual or institution. Direct quotes are enclosed in quotation marks.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1. Perception of responsibility

Perception of responsibilities towards the various documents of the Post-2015 Agenda varied greatly both across institutions and within some institutions in which the data collection was conducted with separate groups. Sixty-four institutions, civil society and private groups were identified by participants through an actor mapping exercise as responsible for or contributing to any given document in the Post-2015 Agenda: 26 were linked to risk reduction (SFDRR), 42 to sustainable development (SDGs), 35 to climate change (Paris Agreements) and 12 to urban development (NAU), with some actors bearing responsibilities to more than one. The specificity of actor involvement varied from the very broad (e.g. academia) to specific units within governmental offices or even philanthropic foundations. The most prominent actors for each thematic area were INECC and SEMARNAT for climate change; OPR and the Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit (SHCP) for sustainable development; CENAPRED for risk reduction; and SEDATU and municipal authorities for urban development. This corresponds to the individual agenda's national focal points or custodian agencies.

None of the participants considered their institutions to be responsible for or deal with topics from all four agendas and only in two

cases (Municipalities and SEMARNAT) were they linked to three agendas, marking these actors as the most cross-cutting. Out of the seventeen institutions taking part, in most cases (13/17), informants saw their work as relating to only one agenda/topic. While the majority of stakeholders had a narrow view of their own institutional responsibilities, often they believed that other institutions had responsibilities with regard to several agendas. This resulted in some discrepancy between self-acknowledged specific responsibilities for planning, implementing or reporting within a specific field and what actors thought the responsibilities of others were (e.g. municipalities did not see themselves as having reporting responsibilities to the agendas, while state and federal actors assumed they did).

Informants were asked to visually display how integrated or fragmented they considered the agenda topics to be based on their own experience within the institutions they worked for. They did so by placing labeled circles in the arrangement they saw fit, where proximity was taken as a proxy for integration. As with Venn diagrams, overlapping agendas were seen as more integrated, while non-touching agendas as fragmented. Another category, “adjacency”, served to distinguish touching yet not overlapping circles, translated as topics that were considered to be close to each other but where in practice there was little streamlining.

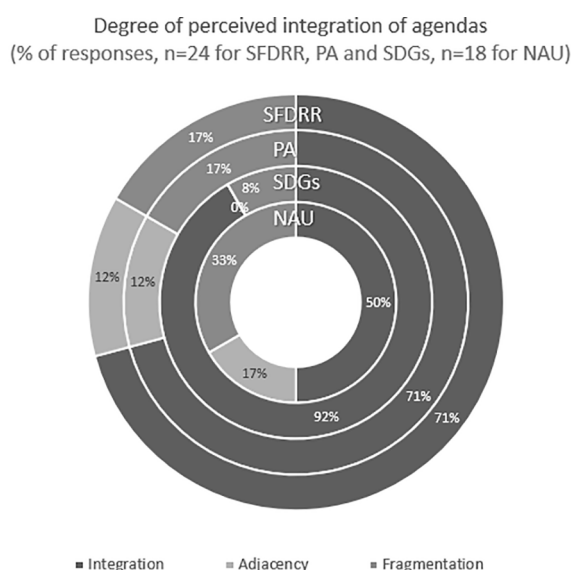
Most participants perceived their work to be relevant to at least one other agenda (Fig. 3). The SDGs were perceived to be the most cross-cutting topic, overlapping with at least one other agenda in 92% of the cases. Urban development as contained within the NUA was seen as the least cross-cutting topic, standing alone in one third of the cases. Risk reduction and climate change had a similar profile of overlapping with at least one other agenda for 71% of the observations, while 12% of informants thought these topics were close without necessarily being integrated, and 17% saw them as disconnected from any of the other thematic foci of the agendas.

#### 4.2. Manifestations of (in)coherence

The interviews conducted during the fieldwork yielded a rich ensemble of examples of how both coherence and incoherence manifest in the day-to-day of public servants’ work in terms of their costs and benefits (Fig. 4). The examples given were grouped into higher-level categories summarized in Fig. 5.

On average, stakeholders at the local level (municipal authorities and local civil protection agents) contributed the most to the category of costs of incoherence and benefits of coherence. In fact, they provided in average almost double the examples for costs of incoherence than the state level stakeholders (6.5 to 12.7), and also doubled the average number of examples of benefits of coherence that national stakeholders provided (1.3 to 2.7). In contrast, these same stakeholders gave no examples of benefits of incoherence and also provided the least number of examples regarding costs of coherence. Federal institutions (and academia, considered to provide a national perspective), had the highest relative contribution to costs of coherence and the lowest to benefits of coherence, while state level stakeholders slightly topped their national counterparts in cases of benefits of incoherence. The only pattern emerging between stakeholders who perceived their institutions as having responsibilities to only one of the agendas or to more than one (section 4.1) is that this latter group contributed significantly more to the examples of benefits of coherence.

Examples of costs of incoherence were both rich and specific. From the 103 coded examples, the most recurrent theme was that a lack of coherence between agencies resulted in overlooked or neglected risks to society, also giving examples of cases in which uncoordinated work created new risks. The data also includes cases of failing and conflicting interventions stemming from contradictory priorities or lack of coordination; cases of duplication of efforts and inefficient use of resources; illustrations of reactive, patchwork approaches; problems linked to fragmented information and non-transparent data; sub-optimal progress reporting; and also cases of corruption, and legal battles that could be traced back to cases of policy incoherence. Such an environment was perceived as promoting



**Fig. 3.** Percentage of responses in which individual agendas were perceived to be integrated, close but not integrated, or not at all integrated in each participant work.

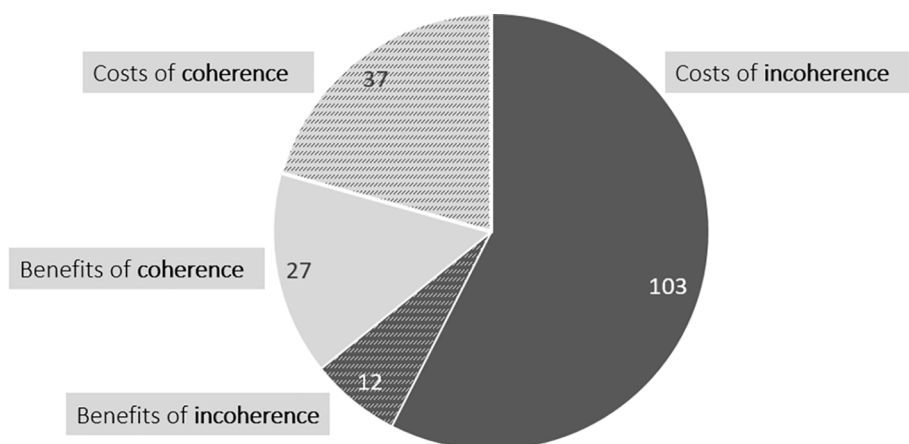


Fig. 4. Number of coded cases of costs and benefits of (in)coherence based on interview transcripts.

mistrust and data secrecy, further deterring collaboration. Psychosocial factors such as demotivated personnel, stigma and loss of public trust was highlighted among participants, underlining the importance of non-material costs of policy incoherence.

In comparison, examples of the benefits of incoherence were less numerous (12 examples) or concrete. These are primarily related to increased specialization of functions and clear (institutional) mandates, which highlights the value some participants placed on not being seen as encroaching into areas of responsibility for other agencies. Incidentally, having clear-cut specialized mandates also was seen as making the achievement of the institution's goals easier. Interestingly, a perceived benefit of policy incoherence was its elasticity, which gives space to implementing bodies to diverge from international commitments and plans passed down the line. According to some, this resulted in an informal line of implementation more flexible and inclusive of different priorities. The only such example was linked to the safeguarding of local culture and customs despite high risk as defined by the authorities.

The examples given about the benefits of coherence were succinct and often hypothetical (27 coded examples), possibly because this is an ongoing process -too recent to gain perspective-, and perhaps because some of the benefits are perceived as being implicitly understood. The most frequent examples were linked to making public spending and investments more efficient, as well as the general improvement of the quality of work the government delivered. Coherence was also perceived to foster innovative projects that tackle complex problems. Other benefits concerned achieving a higher degree of involvement of the public in key processes, thus leveraging public acceptance and trust. Municipal workers mentioned that policy coherence could contribute to increasing local capacities and also making them more competitive to leveraging federal and international funding. More generally, policy coherence was thought to increase cross-sectoral collaboration and data sharing across governmental agencies; the optimization of human resources; the ability to make strategic plans targeting cross-sectoral co-benefits; increased transparency across agencies but also vis-à-vis the population; as well as improving outreach and uptake of information from federal directives to the local level.

On the other hand, among the negative effects of kicking-off a coherence-seeking process (37 coded examples), informants highlighted the double threat of conforming to only a cosmetic level of policy coherence (e.g. creation of cross-sectoral committees with no real reforming power). "Cosmetic coherence" was seen as costly as it failed to solve implementation problems or the underlying issues in their agenda objectives while instead contributing to policy fatigue. Further examples were linked to the time, workload and money required to develop structures, plans, information and capacities for coherence, as well as the related opportunity cost of diverting resources meant for addressing issues seen as urgent or having a higher priority. The effort of seeking cross-sectoral agreement, lobbying, and creating a common technical and non-technical narrative was seen as challenging, as well as a potential source of inter-agency tension, self-censorship and political costs.

The three boxes below are non-verbatim excerpts of the interview data collected in the field. These cases illustrate some of the best developed concrete examples provided by stakeholders. There were no specific anecdotes regarding benefits of incoherence, and so it is not included in the boxes below.

Box 1. Urban development that generates risks	
<b>Costs of incoherence</b>	<i>In an effort to boost the economic development of an impoverished region of the state of Oaxaca through the improvement of road carrying capacity and connectivity, the main road connecting Tehuantepec to Salina Cruz was expanded from two to four lanes. Before this work was done, the houses along the road were at even altitude with the road. However, after the road was expanded—which required much land filling—the houses were close to two meters below the level of the road. After this “development intervention”, the whole neighborhood suffered severe flooding during the next rainy season, as there were no channels to drain the water that became trapped against the roadsides. Management of inter-city roads (federal roads) is the mandate of the Ministry of Communication and Transports, while the city sewage system and related services are responsibilities of the local governments. The lack of communication and coordinated action between these institutions created a new risk for a previously unexposed sector of the population.</i>
<b>Drivers</b>	<i>Sectorial silos, strict hierarchies (top down approaches) Creation of new risks, uncoordinated and patchwork approaches</i>

(continued on next page)



(continued)

Box 1. Urban development that generates risks	
Manifestation of costs	
Ultimate costs	None explicitly mentioned
Impacts	Societal
Related agendas	Sustainable Development Goals, Sendai Framework
Box 3. Lost in translation: the organizational hurdles of building coherence	
Costs of coherence	Coherence brings along the need for time and specialized personnel to be able to translate the general objectives of the agendas into concrete operational measures. Administrative and technical procedures to incorporate innovations in established agency operations are extremely tedious, costly and time intensive. Generally, tasks related to ensuring coherence across agendas have not been seen as part of the normal responsibilities of regular staff, so it has been mostly dealt with by hiring external consultants. Besides the costs of consultancy fees, the short and punctual intervention of consultants is not enough to make procedural changes, so the knowledge produced and recommended practices are often discontinued after the person leaves or the consultancy is over. However, assigning extra responsibilities to currently thinly stretched resources is seen as counterproductive. Some informants were concerned of the opportunity cost of doing otherwise: building up a structure of coherence and a common narrative for the public would take time while the clock for implementing and reporting keeps ticking. Investing in coherence entails the diversion of personnel, time and effort that could be used for implementation.
Manifestation of costs	Opportunity cost, building capacities, overwhelming initial steps
Ultimate costs	Time, money and effort
Impacts	Institutional, societal
Related agendas	Paris Agreement, Sendai Framework, Sustainable Development Goals, New Urban Agenda.
Box 4. Oversight and transparency: improving coordination of building procedures	
Benefits of coherence	All new urban constructions require an approving expert opinion. Until recently, the expert opinion in Mexico City could be delivered by any of three institutions (Civil Protection, Mexico City's Secretaries of Environment - SEDEMA and Urban Development and Housing - SEDUVI). In the past, developers were able to apply to multiple institutions for an expert opinion and cherry-pick the one most favorable to their plans. However, the government has addressed this loophole by creating a new one-stop-shop system (Sistema de ventanilla única) to make expert opinions on urbanism plans coordinated and binding, improving the transparency of the process and contributing to safer housing by strengthening climate resilience and risk reduction criteria within building codes.
Manifestation of benefits	Increased transparency, Data sharing and increased communication, Improved quality of delivery
Ultimate savings	Time, effort
Impact	Societal, institutional
Related agendas	Paris agreement, Sendai Framework, New Urban Agenda, Sustainable Development Goals

#### 4.3. Drivers of policy incoherence

Despite the advancements made by recent administrations to foster cross-sectoral collaboration and the manifested will to improve policy coherence, major challenges remain. Certain aspects related to the way the institutional system is organized, the prevalent political culture and deep-rooted vulnerabilities not only enable but can also incentivize fragmentation. Six core factors that drive institutional policy incoherence in the Post-2015 Agenda implementation were distilled from the interviews.

**1. Temporal mismatches:** A fundamental hindrance to the alignment of governmental action stems from the different time spans for holding office (six years for the president and most key ministerial positions, four years for the state governments and two or three years for municipalities). Although the onsets of some state and local administrations coincide with the beginning of a new presidency, this is often not the case. Regarding institutional cooperation, this translates into uncertainty about the continuity of plans and programmes, mismatched stages of personnel's learning curve and the need to regularly renew contacts and counterparts in other agencies.

**2. Discontinuity and rupture:** In general and to different degrees, every administration turnover in Mexico constitutes a major disruption to governmental activities. In line with the first driver of incoherence, to date there are no governmental plans or national programmes that carry over six years, the length of the presidential mandate. This means that there has been no unified chronogram of action to guide the implementation of the international agendas from the year they were signed. Three different presidential administrations will have governed the country in the period from 2015 to 2030, each of which has the legal capacity to redefine priorities and discontinue previously implemented actions. Furthermore, stakeholders identified a trend towards a six-year (presidential term length) oscillation in the visibility of the agenda topics, as the positioning of one or the other agenda at the forefront of the government discourse responds to the need to differentiate each administration from their predecessors and to prioritize "political commitments." The culture of rupture rather than transition is even more accentuated at the local level, where often there is virtually

No. of categories (ranked)	Manifestations of agenda (in)coherence categorized	No. of examples
<b>Costs of incoherence</b>		<b>103</b>
1	Unaddressed risks and creation of new risks	14
2	Uncoordinated and patchwork approaches	11
3	Failing or contradictory interventions	9
4	Sub-optimal budget allocation	9
5	Duplication of efforts	8
6	Loss in public trust	8
7	Demotivated personnel	7
8	Corruption and inefficiency	6
9	(Legal) conflict	6
10	Sub-optimal or inaccurate reporting	6
11	Contradictory priorities	4
12	Impractical agency organization and confusing mandates	4
13	Secrecy, non-transparent data and failure to collaborate	4
14	Information overburden	4
15	Fragmented information	3
<b>Benefits of coherence</b>		<b>27</b>
1	Budget efficiency	6
2	Improved quality of delivery	6
3	Innovative approaches	3
4	Increased public participation & acceptance	2
5	Increased capacities and competitiveness	2
6	Data sharing and increased communication	2
7	Increased transparency	1
8	Strategic planning	1
9	Optimization of human resources	1
10	Increased outreach	1
11	Increased collaboration and coordination	1
12	Tackling complexity	1
<b>Cost of coherence</b>		<b>37</b>
1	Cosmetic coherence	6
2	Opportunity cost	6
3	Political costs	5
4	Seeking agreement	5
5	Overwhelming initial steps	4
6	Building capacities	4
7	Negotiation of priorities	3
8	Translating technical language to lay people	3
9	Inter-agency tension	1
<b>Benefits of incoherence</b>		<b>12</b>
1	Increased technical specialization	3
2	Clear attributions	2
3	Niches of flexibility as a result of informality	2
4	Differentiated priorities	2
5	easier to accomplish core mandates	2
6	Safeguarding local culture and customs	1

**Fig. 5.** Categories of how costs and benefits of (in)coherence manifest, and frequencies of codes from transcripts. Gradient bars show relative frequencies within a same cost or benefit type.

no relay of functions but a complete restart from scratch, even regarding basic records (e.g. tax collection records) and data (e.g. population data) crucial to their functions.

**3. A heavy bureaucracy with strict hierarchies:** Strict hierarchies and heavy bureaucratic processes inhibit decentralized collaborations and innovative practices. While staff are encouraged to be proactive and think innovatively, in reality there are few incentives to work beyond the achievement of mandated tasks, despite apparent full disposition at medium – more technical — ranks to collaborate with other agencies. However, because hierarchies are very rigid, the will of top functionaries to initiate collaboration is crucial. The lack of flexibility in administrative processes also discourages local decentralized initiatives.

**4. Working silos with budgetary rigidity:** Silos both within and between governmental institutions were found to be prevalent. This phenomenon is reinforced by the strict labelling of budget expenses, which effectively inhibits investing resources in non-core institutional themes and makes it virtually impossible to pool funds with other agencies for joint wider scope projects/programmes.

**5. Disconnection between planning and implementation:** The difficulty to achieve full-fledged implementation of coherent programmes is perceived to be linked to a disconnect between high-level circles and the local realities, as there seems to be very scarce communication between those who design policies and plans and those who are bound to execute them. As the plans and policies are translated from the federal level to the local, they are stripped of the link to overarching or transversal goals and take on a narrower technical perspective meant for operation, or favor local goals over national – and international – priorities.

**6. Knowledge and capacity disparities:** There is a great disparity in quantity and quality between the information produced by different states that is used for reporting and that serves as a basis for planning and implementation. This originates from long-standing socio-economic differences across the country. Because technical capacities to conduct such assessments are lacking at the local and even state levels, only the wealthier or best-positioned (e.g. politically) states or municipalities can afford to contract external consultants, for example.

#### 4.4. Ultimate costs and impacts

As shown in Fig. 5, policy (in)coherence manifests in different ways. These examples can be sometimes further synthesized into expenses or savings in three core resources: time, money and effort. We call these “ultimate costs”. We recognize that these categories are interrelated and often convertible (e.g. money is used to value time and effort, and time spent is often a function of effort), and the choice of codes is meant to stress aspects emphasized during the interviews.

Fig. 6 shows the number of examples of ultimate costs of both coherence (right) and incoherence (left) provided by participants regarding loss of time, money and effort. Only in a sub-set of the total coded segments was the link explicitly made to these resources (41% of costs of incoherence and 84% of costs of coherence), hence the smaller numbers. The figure clearly shows that in absolute terms, participants found that more time and money is lost in a scenario of incoherence, but identified that more effort is invested in coherence. If we take these numbers relative to the total of cases where ultimate costs were linked to manifestations of (in)coherence, however, participants associated coherence building more often to losses in all three categories - time, money and effort. This suggests that the ultimate costs of coherence are relatively more salient.

Examples of time lost to practices listed as incoherent included long hiatuses due to legal disputes between agencies (e.g. the legal fight between two governmental agencies over the right to use road lines) or stand-offs with the public. Several examples referred to poorly planned or coordinated interventions that caused lengthy interruptions in services e.g. faulty reconstruction of a primary school in the aftermath of the 2017 earthquake, or lack of data sharing between agencies, which can greatly increase the time needed to plan and report as data collection is duplicated. Losses of money were often associated to the sunken costs of unfinished constructions or truncated projects due to clashing policies or interventions e.g. having to relocate high voltage pylons due to lack of coordination between transport and energy agencies. Lack of or uncoordinated planning was linked to overspending from an initially planned budget e.g. the environmental oversight agency closing down a state-owned water treatment plant that did not meet their standards, but also due to corruption and inefficient allocation of public funds e.g. in post-disaster reconstruction. Lost effort was mainly associated with duplication of work e.g. secrecy between agencies leading to mapping the same zone twice.

In nearly half of all benefits of coherence examples a direct link was made to gains in time, money and effort. In contrast, benefits of incoherence were rarely attributed to any of these gains. Ultimate time, money and effort costs of coherence were linked to the three factors: 1) the costs of building an institutional set up for coherence (lobbying, capacity building, inter-sectoral negotiation spaces, communication, etc.) and the additional resources needed for implementation e.g. high initial costs of creating climate risk proof roads; 2) the costs associated with “cosmetic coherence” which do not translate into structural changes e.g. costs of consultants, travels, marketing, etc., and 3) the opportunity cost of reallocating resources to coherence-building initiatives which would pay-off in the future despite pressing current needs.

It is clear from the evidence that both coherent and incoherent agenda implementation involve costs and benefits. It is therefore important to disentangle who bears the costs and who reaps the benefits in each scenario. To approximate an answer for this, we coded the data according to whether the impacts of policy coherence or incoherence were mostly felt at the institutional level (costs and effects absorbed by the government) or at a societal level. It was not always possible to make a direct link to impacts, so Fig. 7 represents a subset of the dataset.

The evidence suggests, given the number and specificity of costs provided, that government workers perceive policy incoherence as

an undesirable state, both to institutions and to society. Institutional negative impacts of policy incoherence outweigh the positive impacts on a ratio of six to one. Society at large was found to be negatively impacted by the consequences of policy incoherence in the form of, *inter alia*, increased risks, environmental losses, interrupted or low-quality services, and conflict, while positive societal impacts were almost nonexistent. The only case coded as a societal benefit of incoherence was its alleged safeguarding of local practices, based on the participant's argument that a stricter enforcement of the international agendas (in this case, SFDRR) could lead to the relocation of people living near an active volcano although they preferred to stay. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that coherence was perceived to bring many societal benefits—including a general betterment of the quality of governmental work—but was also linked to a high number of negative institutional impacts linked to the perceived extra time, money and effort it would require, as well as the political costs of negotiating structural changes. The only two cases noted in which coherence had negative impacts for the society referred to the opportunity cost of deviating resources to build coherence, and of a perceived loss in the ability to pursue local priorities rather than those settled in the agendas. However, although there are many negative impacts of incoherence perceived at the institutional level today, the potential type of benefits that coherence would bring to public servants' direct work would be sparse in comparison with the amount of costs they would need to absorb in order to achieve it.

It is important to note that although the figure above shows frequencies, the magnitude of impacts varies greatly across the examples. For instance, the social impact of training 40,000 new technicians in disaster risk management among a pool of youth that were neither working nor studying has immediate benefits for the youth themselves, their families and communities, and has potentially far-reaching rippling effects at longer timespans. On the other hand, a positive impact of incoherence was to allow for informal inter-agency collaboration rather than having to follow formal channels, an example where the impact is arguably more localized and not necessarily exclusive to an 'incoherence' scenario.

## 5. Discussion

The chapters above showed the multiplicity of manifestations of policy (in)coherence from the perspective of Mexican governmental workers. In the collected anecdotal evidence, drivers, manifestations, costs, benefits and impacts often converge in the same example. To differentiate these elements and bring into focus their relationships a typology (Fig. 8) was developed, comparing a scenario of increased coherence against a business as usual (BAU) scenario.

Policy incoherence with regards to the implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda was perceived as being driven by a political culture and organizational arrangements that are not conducive to long-term planning and cooperation and disconnected from local realities. Drivers of incoherence, such as the "watertight compartmentalization" into silos of programs and the strict hierarchies for implementation are exacerbated by power dynamics at play (Surasky, 2017), an aspect reflected in several of the examples provided. Participants highlighted the difficulties of establishing collaboration with other institutions, signaling that inter-agency bureaucratic red tape enabled an environment of secrecy and mistrust that inhibited exchanging data or approaching peers in other institutions without requests going up the hierarchy lines. Another associated obstacle for collaboration is the rigidity in current budget planning. Several participants complained about the difficulties to pool funds when different agencies want to collaborate on a project. The development of budgetary systems that are more flexible and allow for joint planning is an element that has been poised as a precondition to achieving real integration between sectors (Martín et al., 2017).

The perspective of government workers brings to the forefront the constraints of individuals in a system to make changes in a hierarchical, disruptive and often politicized environment (cf. Koff et al., 2020), despite a preference for increased coherence. Overall, the evidence derived from the perception of public servants covers a number of practical issues—such as translating goals to non-technical language or dealing with multiple stakeholders, besides mentioning more abstract questions such as overwhelming complexity of goals, or risk of reputational loss. Stakeholders at all different levels of government were equally capable of providing experiential examples of costs of incoherence, suggesting generalized awareness of the issue. Only the emphasis on different drivers varied e.g. municipalities emphasized the few technical capacities they had and too little time to develop as well as a dearth in baseline data and records due to disruptive transitions. However, increased coherence was not necessarily seen as countering the drivers of incoherence. For instance, although the interviewed stakeholders emphasized the role of discontinuity and rupture in exacerbating incoherencies, none of them stated that increased coherence could somehow guarantee long-term resilience in the face of changing

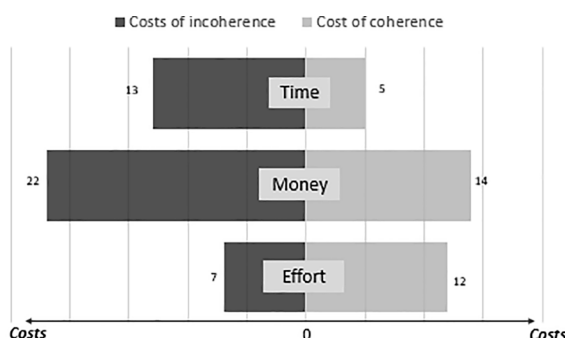


Fig. 6. Number of cases coded with costs related to time, money or effort.

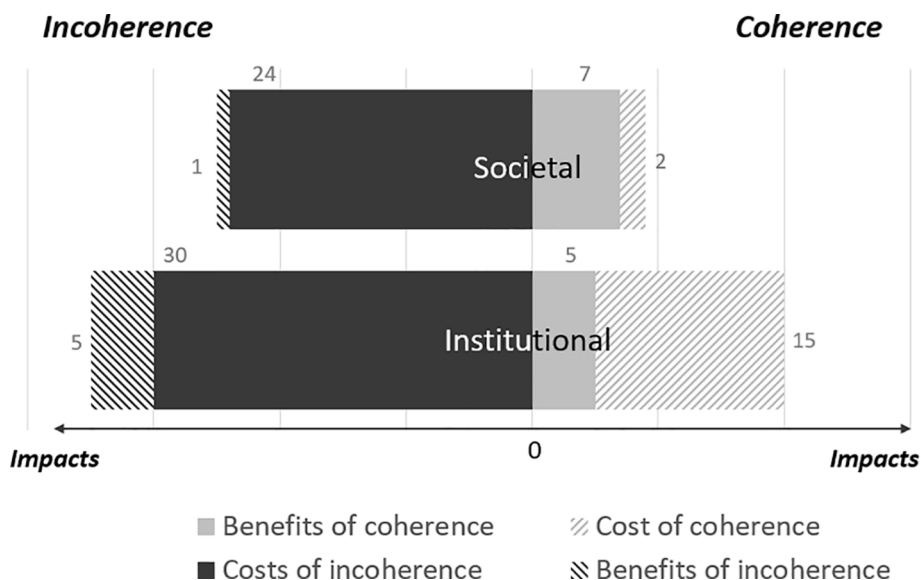
conditions. It is likely that rupture is perceived as a structural problem tied to the political and normative configuration of the country, and thus beyond the areas of opportunity provided by an increase of coherence among the agendas.

While it makes theoretical sense that there would be trade-offs in any of the two scenarios (Fig. 8), it is striking that policy coherence was most frequently associated with ultimate costs of money, time and effort relative to the number of cases coded for each. Based on our research, we provide four possible explanations – or their interplay – for this. The first is that the costs of policy coherence are more salient to government workers and so they might be overrepresented. This can be explained in part by the fact that most of the people interviewed do not think policy coherence is the norm nowadays, and so the saliency of these costs may be due to seeing them as additional to present day's baseline budget of governmental expenses and workload. Secondly, costs of incoherence may seem to be underplayed or normalized considering the high number of examples provided but the low percentages of which explicitly linked costs to losses in time, money or effort. However, we cannot discount that some people assumed that implications of such costs were tacitly understood and hence were not articulated. Third, the perception of stakeholders was spatially differentiated: local level participants were in relative terms more ready to identify costs of incoherence and benefits of coherence, whereas the inverse (costs of coherence and benefits of incoherence) were more prevalent at higher administrative levels (state and national). Fourth, we can also infer from Fig. 7 that perpetuating the incoherent implementation of the agendas is relatively effortless for institutions whereas seeking coherence would require proportionally more money and effort. It could be thus interpreted that policy incoherence effectively externalizes the costs from institutions onto society, who bear much of the negative impacts without seeing the benefits.

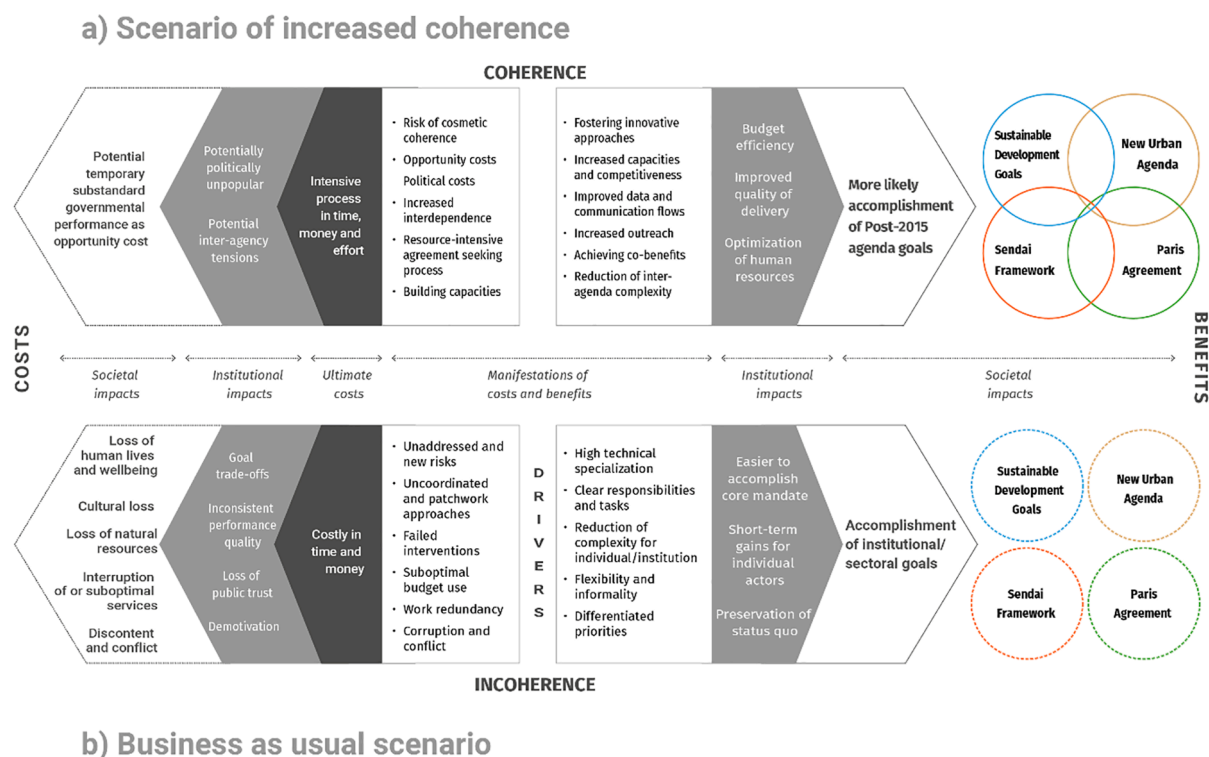
Indeed, building a policy coherent governance system was seen as demanding going beyond easy-fixes and requiring grueling work and agreement seeking. Participants were concerned about both the real opportunity costs of deviating resources to do this and that such an endeavor would be unpopular vis-à-vis the population. As stated by a participant, in terms of political credit it is more profitable to continue focusing on disaster response where benefits of reaction are immediately felt as opposed to investing in prevention, where benefits are diffuse in time and space. The stakeholders' perception that there is a need for structural change is best captured in the examples given about “cosmetic coherence”, where only superficial, box-checking changes are made. This can be seen as maladaptive coherence because it actually detracts from its intended aim by squandering resources. Surasky (2017) remarked the futility of creating spaces where government workers physically coincide without really giving incentives to cooperate. Similarly, participants in our study observed that the creation of certain inter-sectoral committees under the assumption that the simple sum of actors with vertical visions would necessarily lead to synergies was false, resource intensive and yielded a sense of hopelessness of any real change happening. In such cases where coherence cannot be enhanced, recognizing incoherencies and minimizing their costs as much as possible is a more realistic approach for damage control, as proposed by Ashoff (2005).

Once institutional and societal impacts are factored in it is clear from the anecdotal evidence collected that government workers are aware that the costs of incoherence together with the benefits of coherence outweigh the advantages of continued incoherent practices. It is governmental institutions (particularly state and national institutions) and not society who would disproportionately bear the costs of increasing coherence. It is also institutions who overwhelmingly benefit from the current perceived advantages of incoherence, such as having clear mandates and technically manageable tasks. Derived from these findings, it is evident that increased coherence in the implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda represents net gains to society and only relative losses to institutions, once the current costs of incoherence are discounted.

It is tempting to conclude that, given the status of affairs, institutions are primarily guided by self-interest rather than by the



**Fig. 7.** Societal and institutional impacts of policy (in)coherence. Number of instances in which societal and institutional impacts were coded from interview transcripts.



**Fig. 8.** Typology of costs, benefits and impacts of agenda coherence in Mexico in a) an increased coherence scenario, and b) a business as usual scenario.

normative goal of societal wellbeing. However, our results show precisely that public officials' perceptions of policy coherence are varied and complex, and not completely motivated by a cost-benefit calculus. It is clear that because institutions are made of people, and these people do not live on a vacuum away from society, societal impacts end up feeding back as costs to government workers (among the examples mentioned were loss of trust and civil unrest). Despite a common preference for increased coherence, it is also evident that their capacities to effect a change are pinned in place by a web of contextual frictions and barriers. The readiness that Mexico has displayed in adopting international agreements and transferring them into national policy (often as binding norms), does not have an equivalent flexible apparatus for their execution (Hernández-Huerta et al., 2018).

## 6. Conclusion and outlook

Our results present a more nuanced depiction of policy coherence than what is commonly found in the literature, painting a picture in which the costs of coherence are prominent in government workers' minds. We also identify current incentives to incoherence stemming from distinct drivers. Most respondents see their work as not affecting other sectoral domains, but perception varied with those government workers at the local level more inclined to identify examples of costs of incoherence and benefits of coherence, and those at state and national levels driving the nuances. Apparently, current costs of incoherence have become part of the norm to a great extent, thus the resulting impacts on society or to the institutions themselves are seldom classified or quantified. Particularly, psychological and emotional costs related to demotivation of personnel, sense of lack of agency, and loss in public trust remain virtually hidden from the debate. On the other hand, the price-tag for the process of coherence-building is more salient to government workers, and the initial steps often seem overwhelming. However, in looking at who reaps the benefits and who bears the costs of (in)coherence, we see that there are net gains both to institutions and society resulting from an increased coherence scenario once we account for the avoided costs and impacts of incoherence and the accrued societal value of coherence overtime. These net positive impacts come even though it would be a relatively effortful and resource intensive task for institutions. This temporal dimension of accrued value effectively turns most of the perceived ultimate costs of coherence into investments with high initial capital and high long-term returns rather than losses.

Because Mexico is considered a frontrunner in advocating and piloting initiatives for policy and agenda coherence, its experience provides valuable insights for ongoing and future efforts. Its leadership and the resilience of the country's governing systems are nonetheless tested by the confluence of multiple natural hazards risks, a global pandemic, and recalcitrant violence. Caught in a precarious position, it is still to be determined whether the new administration will be able to uphold their commitment to policy coherence, or whether this adverse context will foster a reversal to institutional sectorialism. Identifying drivers of the business-as-usual scenario is key. The achievement of coherence between the Post-2015 Agendas does not hinge merely on their normative and



procedural aspect, such as aligning global frameworks and national laws and regulations, but relies significantly on modifying the architecture of institutional arrangements and work culture that incentivizes incoherence. Providing government workers in charge of planning, implementing and reporting these policies on national and sub-national levels with the means, incentives and spaces to engage in collaborative work is essential. It is reassuring that people who were already exposed to cross-sectoral work (i.e. considered their work to contribute to more than one agenda) were more likely to identify benefits of coherence than others, and so there is reason to believe that increasing collaboration with other sectors through cross-cutting issues of the agendas can make coherence benefits more salient. Also revealing is the fact that local public officials perceived more sharply the distinction between the benefits of coherence and costs of incoherence than their counterparts at other administrative levels, suggesting that coherence-seeking initiatives may garner more support through a bottom-up approach. Although government workers find that the goods of coherence outweigh the bads, they also recognize that increasing policy coherence would require much work and resources compared to the rather effortless yet costly present conditions. Both practice and research in the area of agenda coherence can benefit from incorporating the premise that structural transformation cannot be compromised in favor of easy fixes. Such efforts, as seen here, can lead to maladaptive policy coherence in the form of cosmetic treatment of underlying drivers and token actions without really reducing costs nor reaping benefits. In such cases, a pragmatic approach that recognizes the limits of coherence and seeks to minimize as much as possible the costs of incoherence may be the least costly and most realistic path.

On a conceptual level, we expect our results to contribute to current debates on Policy Coherence for Development. On the one hand, our study moves the focus away from the context of international aid and donor agendas, and towards experiential accounts at the sub-national level. On the other hand, the practical relevance of this topic to feed into international processes is enhanced by simultaneously looking into four of the Post-2015 Agenda documents. Contrary to the usual understanding within PCD literature, the evidence presented in this article shows that other types of trade-offs exist within the incentive structures of public officials that go beyond trade-offs between policy-arenas. Indeed, transformative change and policy considerations are constrained by pragmatic considerations. Nevertheless, it also reveals the limitations of theoretical approaches that see coherence-seeking as a mere mean to maximize efficiency without tackling systemic issues, as this is more likely to enable cosmetic coherence.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

### Acknowledgements

This study was supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GIZ (GmbH) within the framework of the Global Initiative on Disaster Risk Management (GIDRM). We also thank Carl Anderson for reviewing the manuscript, as well as the anonymous reviewers.

### Appendix A. List of institutions taking part in the study.

No.	Institutions/committees
1	Academia
2	CENAPRED, Centro Nacional de Prevención de Desastres (National Center for Disaster Prevention)
3	Civil Protection of the state of Oaxaca
4	Civil Protection of the municipality of Pochutla
5	Committee of Agenda 2030 in Oaxaca
6	COEFSO, Comisión Estatal Forestal de Oaxaca (State Forestry Commission of Oaxaca)
7	GIZ GIDRM (Global Initiative on Disaster Risk Management) and GIZ Agenda 2030
8	Municipality of Pochutla
9	Municipality of San Jacinto Amilpas
10	Municipality of Tehuantepec
11	OPR, Oficina de la Presidencia de la República (Office of the Presidency of the Republic)
12	SCT, Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes (Secretariat of Communications and Transport)
13	Secretary of Integrated Risk Management and Civil Protection of Mexico City
14	SEDATU, Secretaría de Desarrollo Agrario, Territorial y Urbano (Secretariat of Agrarian, Land and Urban Development)
15	SEMAEDES, Secretaría del Medio Ambiente y Energía del Gobierno de Oaxaca (Oaxaca's Secretariat of Environment and Energy)
16	SEMARNAT, Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources)
17	SHCP, Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público (Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit)

### References

Alfie C., M., 2016. Política ambiental mexicana. Montañas de papel, ríos de tinta y pocos cambios en cuarenta años. *El Cotid.* 209–222.

- Anderson, C.A., Bushman, B.J., Bandura, A., Braun, V., Clarke, V., Bussey, K., Bandura, A., Carnagey, N.L., Anderson, C.A., Ferguson, C.J., Smith, J., Osborn, M., Willig, C., Stainton-Rogers, W., 2014. Using thematic analysis in psychology Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Psychiatr. Q.* 0887, 37–41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1978.tb01621.x>.
- Antwi-Agyei, P., Dougill, A.J., Agyekum, T.P., Stringer, L.C., 2018. Alignment between nationally determined contributions and the sustainable development goals for West Africa. *Clim. Policy* 18, 1296–1312. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2018.1431199>.
- Ashoff, G., 2005. Enhancing policy coherence for development: justification, recognition and approaches to achievement. [http://dspace.cigilibrary.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/26063/1/Enhancing policy coherence for development - justification, recognition and approaches to achievement.pdf?1](http://dspace.cigilibrary.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/26063/1/Enhancing%20policy%20coherence%20for%20development%20-%20justification,%20recognition%20and%20approaches%20to%20achievement.pdf?1).
- Collste, D., Pedercini, M., Cornell, S.E., 2017. Policy coherence to achieve the SDGs: using integrated simulation models to assess effective policies. *Sustain. Sci.* 12, 921–931. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-017-0457-x>.
- Di Gregorio, M., Nurrochmat, D.R., Paavola, J., Maya Sari, I., Fatorelli, L., Pramova, E., Locatelli, B., Brockhaus, M., Kusumadewi, S.D., 2017. Climate policy integration in the land use sector: Mitigation, adaptation and sustainable development linkages. *Environ. Sci. Policy* 35–43.
- DOF, 2018. *Reforma a la Ley de Planeación (2018). Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión, Mexico.*
- Etinay, N., Egbu, C., Murray, V., 2018. Building urban resilience for disaster risk management and disaster risk reduction. *Procedia Eng.* 212, 575–582. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.proeng.2018.01.074>.
- Fourie, W., 2018. Aligning South Africa's National Development Plan with the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals: Guidelines from the Policy Coherence for Development movement. *Sustain. Dev.* 26, 765–771. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1745>.
- Francis, R.M., Nair, V., 2020. Tourism and the sustainable development goals in the Abaco cays: pre-hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas. *Worldw. Hosp. Tour. Themes* 12, 321–336. <https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-02-2020-0007>.
- Gioutos, D., Ochs, A., 2019. Crunching numbers: Quantifying the sustainable development co-benefits of Mexico's climate commitments. *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Mexico.*
- GNDP, 2020. Coherence Cookbook : Building resilience in an integrated way. Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction.
- Gobierno de México, 2019. *Estrategia Nacional para la implementación de la Agenda 2030 en México, Documentos.*
- Guerrero, O.A., Castañeda, G., 2020. Quantifying the coherence of development policy priorities. *Dev. Policy Rev.* 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12498>.
- Häbel, S., 2020. Normative policy coherence for development and policy networks EU networks in Vietnam. *Reg. Cohes.* 10, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.3167/reco.2020.100102>.
- Hernández-Huerta, A., Pérez-Maqueo, O., Zamora, M.E., 2018. Can development be sustainable, comprehensive and coherent? *Reg. Cohes.* 8, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.3167/reco.2018.080302>.
- Hsu, A., Weinfurter, A.J., Xu, K., 2017. Aligning subnational climate actions for the new post-Paris climate regime. *Clim. Change* 142, 419–432. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-017-1957-5>.
- Janetschek, H., Iacobuta, G., 2019. Connections between the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda.
- Kanie, N., Griggs, D., Young, O., Waddell, S., Shrivastava, P., Haas, P.M., Broadgate, W., Gaffney, O., Körösi, C., 2019. Rules to goals: emergence of new governance strategies for sustainable development: Governance for global sustainability is undergoing a major transformation from rule-based to goal-based. But with no compliance measures, success will require an unpreceded. *Sustain. Sci.* 14, 1745–1749. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-019-00729-1>.
- Koff, H., 2021. Why serve soup with a fork?: How policy coherence for development can link environmental impact assessment with the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. *Environ. Impact Assess. Rev.* 86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eiar.2020.106477>.
- Koff, H., Challenger, A., Portillo, I., 2020. Guidelines for operationalizing policy Coherence for Development (PCD) as a methodology for the design and implementation of sustainable development strategies. *Sustain.* 12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/SU12104055>.
- Koff, H., Maganda, C., 2016. The EU and the human right to water and sanitation: normative coherence as the key to transformative development. *Eur. J. Dev. Res.* 28, 91–110. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ejdr.2015.77>.
- Kroll, C., Warchold, A., Pradhan, P., 2019. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Are we successful in turning trade-offs into synergies? *Palgrave Commun.* 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0335-5>.
- Martín, P., Mira, J., Mordt, M., Winograd, M., 2017. Articulando la política social y ambiental para el desarrollo sostenible. Opciones prácticas para América Latina y el Caribe. *UN Environment and UNDP.*
- Medina Barrios, M. de la P., Olguin Rodarte, M.P., Solorio Gonzalez, A.R., Sanson Reyes, L., 2017. *Inventario de Atlas de Riesgos en Mexico, Informe del estado actual, Academia de Ingeniería, Mexico. Mexico City.*
- Mier y Terán Ruesga, C., Ramírez Moreno, A.P., 2019. Identificación de los co-beneficios entre los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (Agenda 2030) con resiliencia y gestión del riesgo de desastres. *Implementación práctica para México. Mexico City.*
- Mysiak, J., Castellari, S., Kurnik, B., Swart, R., Pringle, P., Schwarze, R., Wolters, H., Jeuken, A., Van Der Linden, P., 2018. Brief communication: Strengthening coherence between climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. *Nat. Hazards Earth Syst. Sci.* 18, 3137–3143. <https://doi.org/10.5194/nhess-18-3137-2018>.
- Nilsson, M., Weitz, N., 2019. Governing Trade-Offs and Building Coherence in Policy-Making for the 2030 Agenda 7, 254–263. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v7i4.2229>.
- Nshimbi, C.C., 2019. SDGs and decentralizing water management for transformation: Normative policy coherence for water security in SADC river basin organizations. *Phys. Chem. Earth* 111, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pce.2019.02.010>.
- OECD, 2020. Climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. *OECD.* <https://doi.org/10.1787/3edc8d09-en>.
- OECD, 2016. Better Policies for Sustainable Development 2016: A New Framework for Policy Coherence. <https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264256996-en>.
- OECD, 2013. *Reviews of risk management policies: Mexico 2013: review of the Mexican national civil protection system. OECD Reviews of Risk Management Policies* <https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264192294-en>.
- Presidencia de la República de México, 2019. *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2019-2024.*
- Rasul, G., 2016. Managing the food, water, and energy nexus for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in South Asia. *Environ. Dev.* 18, 14–25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envdev.2015.12.001>.
- Rees, S.E., Pittman, S.J., Foster, N., Langmead, O., Griffiths, C., Fletcher, S., Johnson, D.E., Attrill, M., 2018. Bridging the divide: Social-ecological coherence in Marine Protected Area network design. *Aquat. Conserv. Mar. Freshw. Ecosyst.* 28, 754–763. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aqc.2885>.
- Ruiz-Rivera, N., Lucatello, S., 2017. The interplay between climate change and disaster risk reduction policy: evidence from Mexico. *Environ. Hazards* 16, 193–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17477891.2016.1211506>.
- Saldana, J., 2012. An introduction to codes and coding, in: *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. p. 223.
- Sandholz, S., Wannewitz, M., Moure, M., Garschagen, M., 2020. Costs and benefits of (in)coherence: Disaster Risk Reduction in the Post-2015-Agendas. *Synthesis Report, Bonn.*
- Sandoval, V., Sarmiento, J.P., 2018. *Una Mirada Sobre La Gobernanza Del Riesgo Y La Resiliencia Urbana En América Latina Y El Caribe: Los Asentamientos Informales En La Nueva Agenda Urbana. Reder 2*, 38–52.
- Sarmiento, J.P., 2018. What is the post-2015 development agenda? A look from the underlying disaster risk drivers. *Disaster Prev. Manag. An Int. J.* 27, 292–305. <https://doi.org/10.1108/DPM-03-2018-0088>.
- SEDATU, 2020. Programa Nacional de Ordenamiento Territorial y Desarrollo Urbano 2019-2024. *Diario de la Federación (DOF), Mexico City.*
- SEMARNAT-INECC, 2016. Mexico's Climate Change Mid-Century Strategy 100.
- SHCP, 2017. Vinculación del Presupuesto a los Objetivos del desarrollo sostenible. Anexo 2 de los lineamientos para el proceso de programación y presupuestación para el ejercicio fiscal 2018. *Mexico City.*
- A.R. Siders The Role of International Environmental Law in Disaster Risk Reduction 2016 *Environ. Law Disaster Risk Reduct Role Int* 10.1163/9789004318816.
- Spangenberg, J.H., 2016. Hot Air or Comprehensive Progress? A Critical Assessment of the SDGs. *Sustain. Dev.* 25, 311–321. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1657>.

- SRE, 2017. Decreto por el que se crea el Consejo Nacional de la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible. D. Of. la Fed. <https://doi.org/10.22201/ijj.24487872e.2016.16.10409>.
- Stafford-Smith, M., Griggs, D., Gaffney, O., Ullah, F., Meyers, B., Kanie, N., Stigson, B., Shrivastava, P., Leach, M., O'Connell, D., 2017. Integration: the key to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. *Sustain. Sci.* 12, 911–919. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-016-0383-3>.
- Surasky, J., 2017. Romper compartimentos estancos como camino hacia el desarrollo sostenible Breaking watertight compartments as a path to sustainable development. *Rev. Int. Coop. y Desarro.* 4, 62–80.
- Toscana Aparicio, A., Fernández Poncela, A.M., 2016. El capital social ante el vacío gubernamental en los procesos de desastre. Caso Valle de Chalco Solidaridad. Sociedad.
- UNDRR, 2020. Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation: Pathways for policy coherence in Sub-Saharan Africa 80.
- UNESCAP, 2018. Policy coherence for disaster risk reduction and resilience: From evidence to implementation. A toolkit for practitioners 69.
- Valensisi, G., Karingi, S., 2016. From global goals to regional strategies: towards an African approach to SDGs. *African Geogr. Rev.* 36, 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19376812.2016.1185738>.
- VERBI Software, 2019. MAXQDA 2020 [computer software].
- Verschaeve, J., Delputte, S., Orbie, J., 2016. The Rise of Policy Coherence for Development: A Multi-Causal Approach. *Eur. J. Dev. Res.* 28, 44–61. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ejdr.2015.74>.
- Wamsler, C., Johannessen, Å., 2020. Meeting at the crossroads? Developing national strategies for disaster risk reduction and resilience: Relevance, scope for, and challenges to, integration. *Int. J. Disaster Risk Reduct.* 45 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2019.101452>.
- Weichselgartner, J., Pigeon, P., 2015. The Role of Knowledge in Disaster Risk Reduction. *Int. J. Disaster Risk Sci.* 6, 107–116. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13753-015-0052-7>.
- Wisner, B., 2020. Five Years Beyond Sendai—Can We Get Beyond Frameworks? *Int. J. Disaster Risk Sci.* 11, 239–249. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13753-020-00263-0>.
- World Bank FONDEN: Mexico's natural Disaster Fund- A review 2012 Washington DC.
- Zinngrebe, Y.M., 2018. Mainstreaming across political sectors: Assessing biodiversity policy integration in Peru. *Environ. Policy Gov.* 28, 153–171. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.1800>.