Understanding learning in Asian Development Banks' goals-based governance

Jecel Censoro[1], Katharina Rietig and Graham Long

School of Geography, Politics and Sociology
Newcastle University, UK

Abstract

The SDGs are globally agreed goals that lack a binding legal framework and strong institutions. The SDGs rely on steering and orchestration mechanisms amongst different kinds and levels of stakeholders, an approach characterized as "goals-based governance" (GBG). To date, there are limited empirical studies on what goals-based governance means especially for organizations that are expected to support the achievement of the SDGs. This contribution explores the response of the ADB on the SDGs by analyzing how it learns in the process of goals-based governance. Using a learning framework that differentiates between three types of learning across the individual and organizational levels, we develop a distinctive account of what and how ADB has learnt about the SDGs. Findings show that policy instruments are influenced by the SDGs more than the project development. Learning on the SDGs also varies depending on the position and function of individuals. Lastly, ADB does more of experiential learning but no change in underlying beliefs at the organizational and individual level has been observed.

Key words: Sustainable Development Goals, Learning, Goals-Based Governance, Multilateral Development Banks, International Organizations

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[1] Corresponding author: Jecel Censoro, j.censoro2@newcastle.ac.uk.

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals adopted by UN member states in 2015 lack a binding legal framework and a set of strong global and regional institutions. Whether this ambitious agenda is to be realised, even in part, depends instead on steering and orchestration mechanisms amongst different kinds and levels of stakeholders, an approach characterised as "goals-based governance" (Kanie and Biermann, 2017). However, very little is known about the extent to which international organizations learn in the process of implementing such 'goals-based governance'. This is important as learning can facilitate more effective global governance and result in self-reinforcing dynamics as individuals and organizations internalise and proliferate their lessons learned to other individuals, organizations and governance levels (Cashore et al. 2019; Rietig, 2019). Aiming to improve our understanding of governance through goals for the SDGs, we consider the place of *learning* in this new approach. We draw on the established literature around learning to address the question of how the SDGs can generate the change, within and between organizations, that Goals-based governance seems to rely upon. Our central research question asks "What is the role of learning in Multilateral Development Bank's (MDB's) response to goals-based governance for the SDGs?" We addresses the central research question through a case study of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) as a regional-level organization that plays a key role in driving national-level policies. To our knowledge, this is the first piece of research that analyses learning in relation to the SDGs within a multilateral development bank. Using a Learning Framework that differentiates between three types of learning (factual, experiential and constructivist learning, Rietig and Perkins 2018) across the individual and organizational levels, we develop a distinctive account of *what* and *how* ADB has learnt about the SDGs.

There are three key findings: first, development of policy instruments such as plans and strategies have been influenced by the Sustainable Development Goals more than the design and implementation of particular projects. Second, the function and position of particular individuals are key factors in understanding learning. Top management have deeper beliefs about the goals; hence they serve as policy entrepreneurs. Most staff of the organization, particularly project officers, mainly engage in experiential learning. This means they predominantly follow guidelines about how to implement the SDGs within their day-to-day activities rather than the goals influencing their underlying beliefs. Third, though the main factors behind the ADB's work on the goals are external – availability of funds, return of investment, reputational risk and peer pressure, there have been internal changes (beliefs and attitudes) in how this MDB conducts development. This poses the question of the place of the SDGs in these changes – clearly the increase in social sector investment, shift to clean energy and further push for gender equality in projects are consonant with the SDGs, but how far these changes have been driven by learning around the SDGs is a much more difficult question.

We proceed in four parts. The next two sections reflect on goals-based governance for the SDGs and the learning literature. The third part explains the underpinning methodology focussing on a unique data-set of elite interviews and presents novel findings about learning in the ADB in the context of implementing the SDGs. The final part discusses the empirical findings with reference to the SDG and learning literature and offers a conclusion.

Goals based governance for the SDGs

Biermann and collaborators (Biermann et al 2017; Young 2017; Kanie et al 2019) suggest we understand the SDGs as a specific example of goals-based governance, understood as distinct from *rule-setting* approaches with an emphasis on law and compliance on the one hand, and *norm-promotion* regimes on the other. Distinctively, they characterise governance around the SDGs as relying on (i)the steering effects of agreeing overarching goals that motivate commitments and actions in response, (ii)the orchestration of partnerships amongst multiple stakeholders, and (iii) accompanying monitoring regimes. These scholars draw attention to the extensive list of agreed goals and targets, with their accompanying indicator lists and the developing set of institutions that sit alongside the Goals, including the UN High Level Political Forum, as key expressions of this model. However, This picture of the goals as between legal and norm-promotion approaches is more complicated in two respects. First, they recognise that some targets do draw on or reinforce existing legal frameworks (e.g. UNCLOS) and other agreements with their own sets of institutions and compliance mechanisms (UNFCCC; CBD; ILO). Second, some of the significance of the Goals is not captured in the goals themselves but rather in the norms and narratives around them – for example, the frequently expressed imperative for governance beyond silos in response to inter-goals interlinkages, and the highly participatory and deliberative approaches emphasised in the preamble and review framework for this 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.[2]

"Governance through Goals" is a relatively young framework for research. Other environmental agreements have generated a literature around the role of learning in these governance settings which, to our knowledge, has not yet developed around the SDGs. The need for such a literature seems clear, for two reasons. First, learning is central to how the goals are framed and how the institutions around them are developing. As examples, Voluntary National Reviews are presented as occasions for "peer learning", with the HLPF a setting for "mutual exchange and learning" amongst stakeholders. Specific tracks of UN activity address the learning needs of actors; from the regional and global workshops for countries engaging in peer review, to UNITAR's training activities for civil society organizations. The global monitoring framework is itself developing over time as the IEAG-SDGs refine, propose, and take stock of incomplete indicators. The UN guidelines for Voluntary

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[2] These are two of the four imperatives noted by Kanie et al, 2019, though they do not make the claims that we do here.

National Review have been iterated upon four times in four years – indicative of learning within UN-DESA. New modalities for the HLPF, due in 2020, are supposed to reflect "lessons learned" since 2015. Second, If the goals are to be understood as potentially effective despite of - or indeed *because* of - the absence of formal rules, they must rely on actors *understanding* what the Goals require, *applying* the Goals in how organizations and individuals operate, and *internalizing*, at least an extent, the approach that the Goals represent. As we outline in the literature review below, the extant literature on learning addresses precisely these components, and it is difficult to see how goals-based governance can be properly understood without them. Developing this slightly, a focus on learning points us to the question of the "how" of governance through goals – understanding in more detail, for a range of actors, what this means, and how this steering effect spreads through organizations. In turn, this can inform a better appraisal of the key features of Goals based governance – e.g. (i)whether the goals are experienced as a compliance regime, or instead as a matter of taking on board some basic norms; (ii) the relative importance of metrics and indicators in this form of governance; and (iii) whether goals-based governance needs only the steering of organizations, or belief changes for the individuals comprising those organizations.

An MDB is an interesting organizational context in which to study questions of learning around the SDGs. Organizations such as the ADB are non-state yet interstate, learning *from* donor and partner states and the UN system, but also a potential conduit of learning *to* states and other stakeholders. It is also the kind of organization in which we would expect to see changes in response to "goals-based governance" for the SDGs. If some of the elements of the SDGs widely regarded as transformative – the interlinked nature of economic, social and environmental objectives; the injunction to focus on marginalised and disadvantaged groups; a greater emphasis on participation; an expansion beyond an "MDG+" agenda – are new and genuine, we would expect them to matter for what the ADB does, and how it operates. Figure 1 summarizes how norm-enabled, goals-based and rules-based governance corresponds with goals-guided learning.
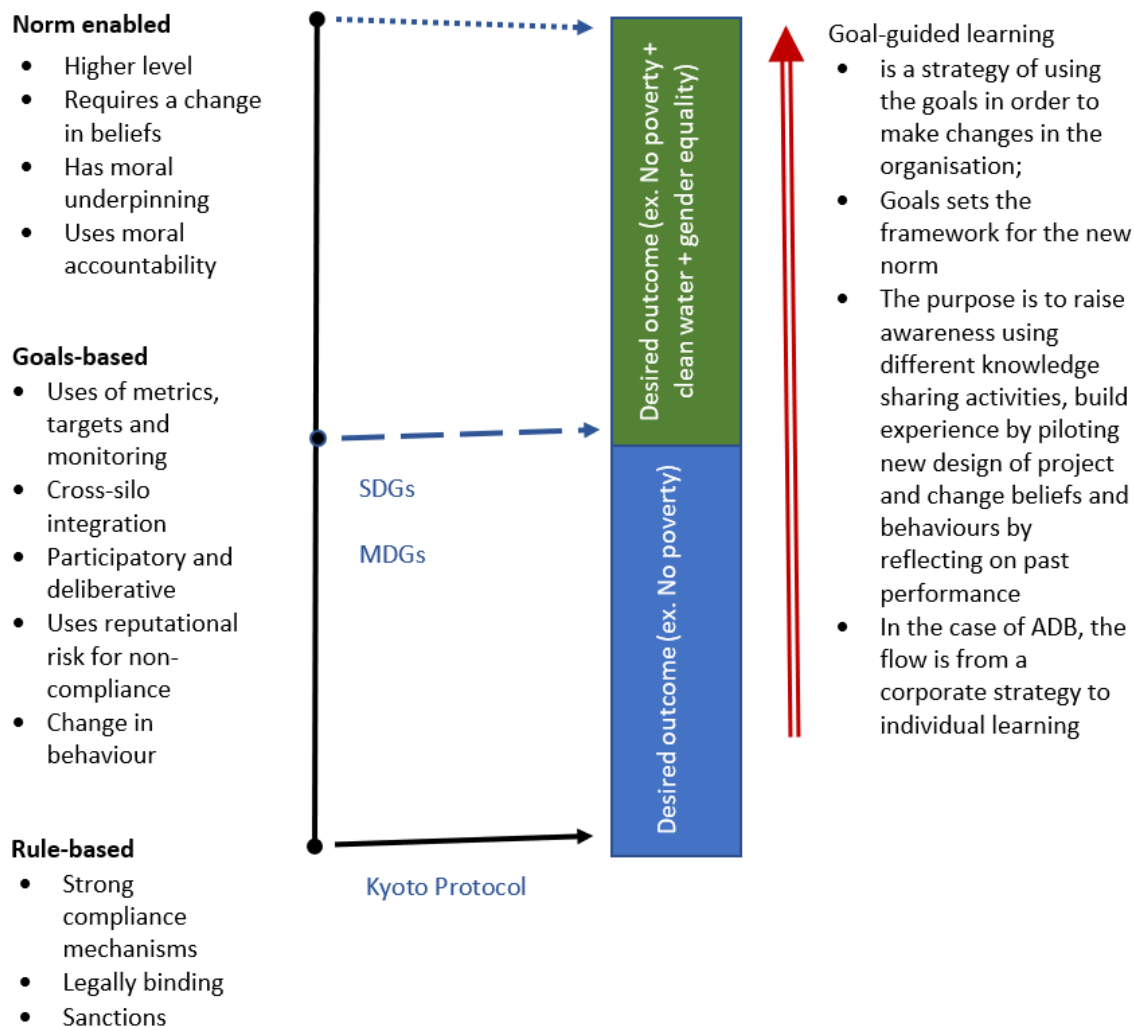
Norm enabled
- Higher level
- Requires a change in beliefs
- Has moral underpinning
- Uses moral accountability

Goals-based
- Uses of metrics, targets and monitoring
- Cross-silo integration
- Participatory and deliberative
- Uses reputational risk for non-compliance
- Change in behaviour

Rule-based
- Strong compliance mechanisms
- Legally binding
- Sanctions

SDGs

MDGs

Kyoto Protocol

Desired outcome (ex. No poverty + clean water + gender equality)

Desired outcome (ex. No poverty)

Goal-guided learning
- is a strategy of using the goals in order to make changes in the organisation;
- Goals sets the framework for the new norm
- The purpose is to raise awareness using different knowledge sharing activities, build experience by piloting new design of project and change beliefs and behaviours by reflecting on past performance
- In the case of ADB, the flow is from a corporate strategy to individual learning

Figure 1. Goals-guided learning. Compiled by authors.

Learning in governance

Learning is frequently defined as updating of beliefs (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013), acting upon experiences and correcting errors, resulting in altered behavior (Argyris, 1976). Both individuals and collectives can learn with the result of "'collective products' that emerge from the process, such as new shared ideas, strategies, rules, or policies" (Gerlak and Heikkila, 2011, p. 623). It is important to understand learning as conscious process and to differentiate learning from 'not learning'. Otherwise the usefulness of the learning-lens would be reduced if every input would result in learning. Following Rietig and Perkins (2018, p. 491), this contribution defines learning as "a reflection and judgment based on an input, leading the individual and/or organization to select a different view on (1) how things happen, i.e. additional knowledge (*factual learning*) or (2) what course of action to take, i.e. the

reflection on individual or collective experience or advice from others on such previous experiences (*experiential learning*). The judgment can lead to an individual or collective change in beliefs (*constructivist learning*)."

Beliefs are a person or organization's view of the world and contain normative understandings how things ought to be, which can mean maintaining or changing the status quo. Belief changes mean that *constructivist learning* occurs (Nye, 1987). Constructivist learning occurred if an individual or organization reflected on an experience- or knowledge-based input and subsequently changed secondary, policy-core or, in very rare cases, deep-core beliefs. To identify such constructivist learning, it is important to compare the individual or organization's beliefs at the end of the examined time frame to the beliefs at the beginning of the time frame (Radaelli 2009).

Learning among individuals and within organizations

Most learning frameworks are concerned with either learning of individuals (individual level) or among a number of individuals (collective) ranging from a small group within e.g. a government organization to millions as members of society (Gerlak and Heikkila, 2011; Zito and Schout, 2009). This suggests that learning can occur on the level of individuals (individual level) or within (e.g. government) organizations. Learning on such organizational level occurs when an organization such as a government ministry or company updates its knowledge, experience and/or beliefs about a matter and as a result changes e.g. its behavior or official negotiation position on an issue (Argyris, 1976; March and Olsen, 1975). The individual and organizational levels are interdependent with the socio-political landscape, which describes changes in wider society within or across countries and that can stimulate reflection among policymakers on experience or new information, which in turn can result in learning.

Learning on the *individual level* refers to an individual policymaker that reflects on input such as new information and thus engages in factual learning, or reflects on an experience, resulting in experiential learning (see Braun, 2009; Dunlop, 2009) and potentially also subsequently changes underlying beliefs (constructivist learning). Learning among several individuals can be transferred to the *organizational level* under the involvement of policy entrepreneurs (Mintrom and Norman, 2009; Mintrom, 2013) as central learning agents that can facilitate learning between individuals governmental institutions on the organizational level (Rietig and Perkins, 2018). Policy entrepreneurs can be independent or organized in issue networks, policy communities and coalitions (Bomberg, 2007; Copeland and James, 2013). The organizational level begins where official negotiation positions of e.g. governmental institutions are formed and groups of policymakers are involved (Heikkila and Gerlak, 2013), but are representing their employer's official position, which can diverge from their personal opinions or perspectives. Once individuals speak or decide 'on behalf of' e.g. their unit, gov-

ernment department, company, NGO or country, policymaking takes place on the organizational level (Rietig and Perkins, 2018).

A further distinction between the individual and organizational level beyond the expression of personal opinion is the legitimacy to participate in the political decision-making process, which is not attributed to individuals in their private capacity, but only to representatives of a governmental organization or public office in a professional capacity (Rietig and Perkins, 2018). This is also where the interdependency of these two levels becomes clear. An individual policymaker holds both a personal opinion linked to personal beliefs, but the individual may not be permitted to represent this personal opinion, as it does not match the organization's official position. The organization's position or policy however would usually be aligned with its beliefs. This means that the problem is important to the organization's purpose and seen as worth dealing with, resulting in a particular belief of what should be done about the problem and how the exact policy details should look like. Individual-level constructivist learning is transformed into constructivist learning on the organizational level if the individual succeeds in influencing the organization's position to align with the individual's beliefs. Factual learning on the organizational level occurs when the overall organization reflects on new information-based input and adds the knowledge to its' existing knowledge base such as communicating the knowledge to its employees or archiving it in databases. Experiential learning within the organizational level is closely linked to the individual level as the employees of the organization accumulate work experience on certain issues and thus collectively engage in experiential learning on the organizational level (Rietig and Perkins, 2018). If this experience is managed via reports, it can be used by the organization after the individual moved on to another job. Thus, there can also be a link between experiential learning in the past, when a group of individuals gained working experience on for example policy processes and moved on to positions outside the organization but left detailed records of their experiences. New decision-makers engage in factual learning when they reflect on information left behind by their predecessors and gain working experience (i.e. individual-level experiential learning).

No reflection, no learning: defensive avoidance and following orders

If individuals or organizations do not reflect on the input, they do not engage in learning. Yet, policy change still occurs and policies get implemented. This means that the outcome can be explained through other mechanisms than learning. Such non-learning among decision-makers can occur due to other factors such as power, ideology, political interests, constraints in organizational capacity and defensive avoidance (Buchanan and Badham, 1999; Contu, 2003; Janis, 1972; Janis and Mann, 1977; Vince, 2001), which is also referred to as reactive governing or 'muddling through' (Lindblom, 1979).

Decision-makers may consciously or unconsciously avoid addressing a problem, thus engaging in defensive avoidance (Janis and Mann, 1977). This form of psychological defence interferes with information processing and is frequently connected to unconscious sources of unresolved conflict regarding a decision (Janis and Mann, 1977: 98). Especially decision-makers have usually two options when confronted with a problem that requires a resolution: either they address the problem by designing a trial solution (Swann, 1999) and thereby enter a process of experiential or potentially constructivist learning, or they resort to defensive avoidance. Aspects of defensive avoidance are procrastination, buck passing and bolstering (Janis and Mann, 1977: 107). Furthermore, they could simply be following orders without reflecting on the knowledge or experience gained throughout the process.

The hindering factors highlighted in the non-learning literature point towards individual factors, institutional barriers and political issues dominant in the policymaking sphere of multilevel and multi-actor governance. Central explanations other than learning are the influence of powerful actors (Barnett and Duvall, 2005) and their voting power, political bargaining (Moravcsik, 1993), power within the organization (Preston and Hart, 1999; Wilson, 1995), the influence of industry lobbying organizations and powerful economic interests (Forsyth, 2003). Therefore, the question if decision-makers learn also needs to take into account instances where decisions for policies are avoided through procrastination, wishful thinking that the situation resolves itself, delegating the decision to other individuals/ groups or ill-considered decisions based on groupthink (Janis, 1972). These forms of defensive avoidance or decisions hinder the policy-makers from entering into a learning process and thus constitute instances of non-learning.

The central role of policy entrepreneurs in learning processes

By developing and negotiating new policy proposals across decision-making bodies such as parliamentary working groups, individual policymakers can become *policy entrepreneurs.* Policy entrepreneurs can be highly visible elites such as members of parliaments or government, but also bureaucrats working 'behind the scenes' as civil servants e.g. in national ministries, international organizations or non-governmental organizations (Hammond, 2013). Key characteristics of policy entrepreneurs are exercising leadership skills and using personal acumen to achieve their objectives. To this end, they increase the attractiveness of policy change by aligning a policy idea with public opinion and actively promote their policy proposal by convincing other actors of its importance. Strategies include repeating arguments, emphasizing facts or positive outcomes of impact assessments or scientific studies (Arnold et al., 2016; Copeland and James, 2013; Mintrom, 2013; Roberts and King, 1991). Policy entrepreneurs are the central linkage between learning on the individual level and adoption of a common position on the organizational level. Individual policy entrepreneurs can persuade and convince other actors inside and outside their organizations of the importance to support their policy proposal

(Braun, 2009) by raising awareness of the underlying problems and changing other actors' beliefs in support of achieving the policy entrepreneurs' policy objective. Policy entrepreneurs are frequently public mangers and bureaucratic leaders in central decision-making positions with the ability to influence policy and policy change. They can use their political acumen to steer organizational decision-making (Mintrom, 2009) and thus arrive at a decision underpinning the organization's position that is aligned with their beliefs. These activities of individual policy entrepreneurs can result in convincing other actors within the institutions of the importance to support the policy proposal by changing their beliefs via an increase in knowledge and higher awareness of the problems related to the policy proposal. Thus, policy entrepreneurs are a crucial to transfer learning processes from the individual level to the organizational level and vice versa. The following table provides an overview of the theoretical framework on learning used to evaluate learning in implementing policy decisions in the following empirical section (based on Rietig and Perkins, 2018: 493).

	Factual learning	Experiential learning	Constructivist learning
Individual level	Individual actors have acquired (e.g. from studies) and reflected on new information; increased knowledge and expertise deployed by actors in their task environment.	Active engagement with particular issue through direct experience and reflecting on successes and failures to enhance actors' existing political or bureaucratic practices and competencies.	Changed personal norms, values or policy beliefs; underpins new and/or reinforced personal commitments and actions.
Organizational level	New knowledge is acquired by and transmitted through an organization; reflection, incorporation and use of knowledge in organizational activities and/or to inform organizational position.	Critical reflection on existing practices and performances within context of existing organizational goals; the accompanying development and/or refinement of new organizational processes, strategies and behaviors.	Change in organizational beliefs and values over time; institutionalization of normative beliefs, the reframing of organizational goals and discontinuous organizational action.

Table 2. Criteria for identifying learning in the policy process. Source: Rietig and Perkins, 2018: 493.

Methodology

To identify the role of learning in ADB's response to goals-based governance, process tracing is used to study the causal mechanisms between the goals and the changes in policies, process and products of the bank[3] from 2000 to 2020, covering the time span when the MDGs entered into effect until 5 years

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[3] The Asian Development Bank (ADB), a regional development bank, is one of the first MDBs that used the SDGs as a framework for its new policies, processes and products. ADB is also one of the oldest MDBs with a strong reputation of leading development in the region. It covers Asia Pacific, home of more than half of the world's population and the region with the highest GDP growth (World Bank, 2019).

into SDG implementation. First, a mapping is done to determine if the changes match the requirements of the goals. Second, the reasons behind the changes, i.e. if they can be attributed to learning, are determined through elite interviews. There are a total of 37 respondents (2 from the office of the president, 3 from the policy department, 6 sector and thematic directors at the Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department (SDCC) who led the development of plans for the operational priorities of Strategy 2030, 4 specialists in SDCC, 4 director generals of the sub-regions, 2 sector directors of regional operations, 2 country directors, 2 from the evaluations, 6 project officers, 2 from safeguards/core labour, 2 retirees and 2 from the civil society office) identified from the list of key authors of policies (Strategy 2020 and Strategy 2030) and through snowball sampling. Ten of the respondents have been with ADB for more than 20 years, 17 for more than 10 years and the rest for less than 10 years. Interviews were transcribed, coded using NVIVO 12 and were analysed using the learning framework above.

A response to goals-based governance occurs when there is a change in the organization that corresponds to the requirements of the SDGs. This can be the use of the goals and indicators in the bank's monitoring system, a move to a more cross-sector management of projects, a more participatory engagement with different stakeholders or emphasis to the marginalised and vulnerable. Adoption of these changes are classified to the different learning types, whether it is an acquisition of new knowledge (factual learning), gaining new experiences (experiential learning) or changing of underlying beliefs (constructivist learning). The role of policy entrepreneurs will also be discussed and the reasons for non-learning in the organization.

Evidence of learning in ADB's response to the goals-based governance of the SDGs

Discussion on the role of learning in ADB's response to goals-based governance involves looking at changes in two spaces, within the MDB and with MDB's partners. First, MDBs such as the ADB have their own mandates and systems that have to be adjusted in order to accommodate the SDGs. Second, MDBs should be able to manifest heir contributions on goals-based governance through the support they provide to their partners and clients.

The Strategy 2030 is the bank's main statement of commitment to the global agendas (e.g. SDGs, Paris Agreement and Addis Ababa Agenda). From its focus on poverty reduction, the bank emphasized the achievement of a prosperous, inclusive, resilient and sustainable Asia Pacific for Strategy 2030 (ADB 2008; ADB 2018). Although the bank supported the achievement of the MDGs, its response was insufficient to meet the targets since its intervention was limited to reporting out-

comes and outputs that matches to the goals. With Strategy 2030, the SDGs are used as one of the foundations for the vision. The performance indicators of the Corporate Results Framework utilizes the relevant SDG indicators. The new guidelines for the Design and Monitoring Framework (DMF) that are used in designing projects requires tagging the relevant SDGs that the project proposal will be contributing to. A 'Results and Aid Management' division was also created along with the recruitment of a specific person who will ensure that what the bank does is aligned to its global commitments. The new Strategy 2030 also have 7 operational priorities that matches with some of the SDG goals: poverty and inequality (SDG 1, 3, 4 and 10), gender equality (SDG 5, 10), climate change, climate and disaster resilience and enhancing environmental sustainability (SDG 6, 7, 13, 14 and 15), liveable cities (SDG 6, 7, 9, 11, 12), rural development and food security (SDG 2, 6, 8, 9, 12), governance and institutional capacity (SDG 16) and regional cooperation and integration (SDG 17). ADB also strengthened its Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department (SDCC) by delegating the responsibility to create the operational plans for the 7 priorities. Since Strategy 2030 with its new framework and tools uses the SDGs as one of its framework, its application in ADB's operations is the bank's contribution to goals-based governance in the region.

Factual learning

Both MDGs and SDGs are in the consciousness of bank staff but not everyone has the understanding on what it requires to achieve them (Interview 4,14, 16). As a key player in development, bank staff are usually involved in discussions related to the goals since they are considered to be subject experts. According to some respondents, bank staff influences the development of the SDG indicators as they participate in roundtable discussions with the UN (Interview 5, 10). The principles behind the SDGs are not totally new to bank staff since individuals from the sector and thematic groups of the Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department (SDCC; formerly called the Regional Support Department) have been pushing for changes in the bank's approach even before the goals exist. For example, ADB has been advocating gender equity since 1980s (Interview 27). Some staff would include a section on gender in their projects to report how it considered the gender dimension of the project but it is not common in the infrastructure-focused bank. ADB's Non-Government and Civil Society Office (NGOC) has also been pushing for a wider and more meaningful citizen engagement even during the MDGs. Inclusive development has also been promoted by various sectors in ADB during the MDG period but early efforts are scattered and in silos within the bank. Staff have pointed out system restrictions and hierarchical culture of ADB as barriers for learning (Interview 1, 15, 25, 28). As a result, project officers would focus more on fund disbursements and in ensuring that country demands are met rather than applying what they know.

As an organization, SDGs and the requirements for goals-based governance are not new to ADB. In fact, ADB already mentioned governance adjustments that needs to be taken for the post-2015 agenda in the midterm review of its Strategy 2020. The bank's use of the SDGs as one of the references for its Strategy 2030 is more as a recognition that the global agenda is important, and the bank is doing its part to make sure that it is achieved. What qualifies as a new knowledge for are the stories and best practices that it collects from its member countries as part of the SDG Snapshot activity (Interview 5 and 9). Another source of new knowledge are the country reports on the SDGs that it consolidates and analyses with UNESCAP and UNDP. These country reports are utilised by the bank to develop knowledge products and interventions that can support countries in achieving its commitments to the goals (Interview 5, 9 and 17). Since ADB is also part of a wider network of stakeholders who committed the SDGs, lessons on the experiences of other organizations are also relayed to the bank (Interview 5).

Experiential learning

Meeting the MDGs is one of ADBs' unfinished business under its previous Strategy 2020. ADB's approach on the MDGs was limited to matching what was already planned and reporting those activities that contribute to the MDGs (Interviews 9, 37). Strategy 2030 was developed using the findings of the Strategy 2020 midterm review, various stakeholder consultations and pressure from the board to become more proactive in meeting global agendas. The bank already learned from previous experience of implementing the MDGs that mere reporting of business as usual is not enough (Interviews 5, 9, 12). Governance of the global agenda such as the SDGs required integration in the policies of the bank - corporate strategy and results framework. The President of ADB at that time played a key role in emphasizing the need to act more on gender and climate change. Best practices are also brought to the corporate strategy such as the experience of solving air pollution in Beijing through cross-sector collaboration and the importance of having a country-focused approach (Interview 10 and 12). The priorities also moved sectoral to thematic that closely resembles certain SDGs. Strategy 2030 also emphasized data management and rigorous measurements using common indicators, activities that were missed in MDG implementation.

Everything that the bank does is supposed to align to Strategy 2030. Implementation of Strategy 2030 relies heavily on a top to bottom governance where new policies, priorities, guidance and tools are relayed down from the management to departments and country offices. Multi-layer and multi-sector checking of ADB documents (i.e. project proposals, project reports, policy) and progress are to ensure that projects are contributing to the results framework and operational priorities set under the new Strategy 2030. Regional director generals (DGs) serve as the main control point to en-

sure that projects align with ADB's strategy and CPS. From idea generation based on the CPS, the DG gives a "yes" or "no" on whether the project should proceed depending on how it contributes to the strategy and indicators. The DG also maps the pipeline projects to determine which projects contribute to which. Performance evaluation is done to track progress in achieving the goals, from the individual, departmental to organizational level. Both staff from the operations and SDCC report their accomplishments and gaps. The report serves as a reflection document lessons learned from the past and what needs to be considered for the next plan. They take these evaluations reports seriously. The Independent Evaluation Department (IED) creates a separate report on ADB's performance that goes directly to the board.

The Country Partnership Strategy (CPS), the main reference on what kinds of activities can be done in a country, uses the strategy as reference. The CPS is a negotiated document between ADB and the countries on what are the priority areas that will require ADB's support. If there is government has buy-in to the goals, then negotiation will be easier. SDCC along with the Strategy, Policy and Partnerships Department (SPD) and director generals of regional departments ensure that everything that ADB does is aligned to the Strategy 2030, the operational plans and the CRF. The bank is now more conscious in aligning what it does to the strategy and CRF. No project can be approved by the president or the board without going through due diligence which means, all projects should be SDG-tagged and should be able to identify the indicators it is contributing to. Under SDCC, the bank also formed a Knowledge Advisory Centre and Digital Technology unit to manage the innovations and knowledge sharing within and with partners of the bank.

Project teams are now from different sectors and levels of the organization in order to encourage a thematic approach to problem solving rather than siloed (or sectoral) approach. This is called ONE ADB approach. This meant a more cross-sector and multi-level engagements in project development, implementation and evaluation. This cross-sector collaboration serves as an opportunity for staff from SDCC to influence the design of the projects to become more integrated in its approach (i.e. inclusion of women in agriculture projects that use renewable energy). Since they are more actively part of projects, specialists in SDCC are able to promote the use of special funds (e.g. Climate Change Fund, Financial Sector Development Partnership Special Fund, Asia Pacific Disaster Response Fund) to encourage countries to do focused projects related to climate change, disaster response, etc.

At the individual level, usefulness of the strategy varies depending on the role of the individual. Project officers try to contribute to the strategy out of compliance. However, their main priority is really to address the request of the countries. Regional directors and heads of divisions are supposed to also align their department plans, division plans and individual workplans to the operational priorities. Failure to comply in the operational plans and in meeting target indicators can affect the performance rating of the director and the department. This is a carrot and stick approach to ensure that everyone is on the same page. For people in SDCC, Strategy 2030 is an opportunity to move their agenda forward. To support the strategy, SDCC amplifies their knowledge sharing activities by produc-

ing research, videos and launching events to showcase best practice, encourage discussions and provide a venue for external audiences to also share their ideas with the bank. They also provide expertise to countries on how to implement the SDGs. SPD and SDCC produce several knowledge materials and publishes country assessments to support countries in its SDG implementation. Although this is not very different from what they did before, ADB has specifically setup Technical Assistance (TAs) that uses grants to provide research, training and project pilot support for the purpose of learning. These TAs are "free funds" offered to countries with the aim of exploring possible projects in the country. The country can choose not to avail a bank product after the TA's implementation or ADB can also choose not to provide any other services after.

At the regional and global level, MDBs share their experiences to each other in implementing goals-based governance (Interview 5). ADB supports UNESCAP and UNDP in its knowledge product and knowledge events related to the SDGs. These three IOs prepare assessment reports on regional status of SDGs and recommendations to countries on what to do. ADB also collaborate with various stakeholders particularly private sector to help in the financing of its strategy. In January 2020, ADB officially launched ADB Ventures which aims to encourage impact investments to support the achievement of the SDGs.

Constructivist learning

ADBs' response to goals-based governance of the SDGs did make several changes in the bank's policies, processes and policies but there is no evidence of it changing the beliefs of the individual or the organization on how development should be done. Although the bank made commitments on the MDGs, response required for goals-based governance are only done during the SDGs. That meant less than five years since the SDGs were launched and only two years since Strategy 2030 was approved. It is still early to observe changes in beliefs (Interview 35, 36).

Through time and though slow, ADB has proven to be responsive in the changing demands of the countries and the global community (Interview 3, 17, 35). Socio-economic changes, global shocks, environmental disasters and civil society pressure are key triggers that changed the bank's approach (ADB History). Some examples are the Asian Financial Crisis of 1998, NGO protest in 2000 on ADB projects' environmental impact at the bank's annual meeting and series of environmental disasters in the region for the last two decades (i.e. Indian Ocean tsunami and earthquake of 2004 and Super Typhoon Haiyan in 2013).

ADB is both a development organization and a bank. Most of its staff have business or economics background which influences the bank's approach. Based on its charter, its purpose is:

"to foster economic growth, co-operation in the region of Asia and the Far East…and to contribute to the acceleration of the process of the developing member countries in the region, collectively and individually" (Article 1, ADB Charter 1966)

Although changing, the need to disburse funds and be able to respond to country needs are still the two main purposes of the organization. At the individual level, no interviewee mentioned the goals nor any of the strategies as the reasons for the changes in their beliefs. Operations staff identify past experiences, previous mistakes, engagements with stakeholders on the ground and learning from experiences of others as the reasons for the change in their perspectives (Interview 15, 24, 28, 35). For those at the policy offices, change in beliefs happen after the policies have been applied and lessons from the application are reflected upon (Interview 5, 17, 33), All of the staff have been working on development for more than 10 years so when they joined the bank, they already have their standards on what needs to be done that they use in their work.

Non-Learning

Since ADB is one of the default partners of UN, it ultimately played a key role in shaping the SDGs based on its experiences and expertise. Also, the board of the bank who are representatives of the countries that committed to the goals, were also obliged to push the bank to do more about the goals since this is part of their commitment to the SDGs. It is important to note that countries are stockholders of the bank so they must direct their investment to something that will contribute to the SDGs since they will be reporting this at the HLPF. Developed countries don't need to report on their contribution to the MDGs before.

Discussion on the importance of learning in ADB's response to goals-based governance of the SDGs

Our findings suggest that there is factual and experiential learning within ADB, both at the individual and organizational level. The individual staff and the organization are also aware of the SDGs and the principles of goals-based governance. At the individual level, the understanding varies depending on the people's background, their role in the organization and their workload. Individuals from the Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department tend to have a more advanced understanding of what the goals are and are actively mainstreaming the ideas behind it in the bank. Project officers on the other hand, are more concerned about the country context, government demands and needs on the ground. They believe that having a bottom-up approach of knowing and doing are more important

in order to achieve the goals than the box-ticking exercise suggested in the organization's guidelines. Since there are a lot of overlaps to what the SDGs require and what the bank does, there tends to be an automatic matching of what are already being done to what the SDGs require. The new knowledge that comes with the adoption of the SDGs are the success and failure stories of countries implementing goals-based governance.

The type of learning that dominates ADB is experiential learning. ADB as an organization reflected on its experience of adopting the MDGs recognising that what it did before is not enough to achieve the goals. As an organization, it recognized that it needs to do more than reporting and matching. Therefore, the SDGs were institutionalized as a framework in ADB's Strategy 2030 and results framework. It created a "carrot and stick" approach in order to ensure that everything the banks does is aligned to the strategy. A reward is given to those who comply and those who do not follow will have to explain their deviation to guidelines. ADB also learned from the siloed sectoral approach and moved to cross-sector collaboration through the thematic design of its 7 operational priorities and ONE ADB approach. ADB ONE approach is a direct way of influencing project operations by involving different staff from different sectors. It paves the way for SDCC staff to influence the project design, project implementation and even the CPS development, crucial processes in ADB.

At the individual level, the function and position of individuals are key factors in understanding learning. Top management particularly the president served as the policy entrepreneur who promoted the gender and climate-change agenda in the organization. New staff from other organizations such as UN and WBG were given key responsibilities in developing Strategy 2030 and the 7 operational plans. This became an opportunity for them to transfer their knowledge and experiences to ADB. Project officers on the other hand follow these new plans and guidelines as part of their project's due diligence. There is a recognition that the goals are important to be met but it does not warrant a change in their current beliefs.

Constructivist learning is hard to claim at the organizational and individual level. At the organizational level, the changes that the bank implemented are not because of a change in beliefs but more on managing the peer pressure, donor demand and reputational risk. ADB is both a bank and a development organization so it needs to create the balance in ensuring its financial sustainability and contribution to sustainable development. At the individual level, the project officers hold on to their belief that country preferences should be prioritized more than designing projects to meet corporate targets. For SDCC staff, the goals and its principles are something that they are already familiar with, therefore, it does not really change their beliefs. Table 1 summarizes the findings.

Table 1. Summary of key learning types in ADB's response to goals-based governance of SDGs

	Factual Learning	Experiential Learning	Constructivist Learning	Other explanations other than learning
Individual	Staff are aware of the global goals and their requirements. However, they don't think of the SDGs whenever they design projects or implement their plans. Understanding of the principles of goals-based governance vary	Strategy 2030, CRF, staff instructions and other corporate requirements are applied by everyone, but its usefulness varies depending on the role of the individual. Project officers use it for compliance while specialist in SDCC use it to teach the bank and stakeholders of the bank.	Strategy 2030 and the goals have no effect on changing people's beliefs because their principles are already aligned to the requirements of the two.	Compliance for promotion
Organisational	New information from countries and partners on their experience of applying the goals	Carrot and stick approach in learning to make sure that everything the bank does is aligned to Strategy 2030. Incentives and sanctions are in place to ensure compliance. No reflection and behaviour change but rather a fulfilment to their commitment to the regional and global community	ADB as an organisation is still in the process of learning how the use of goals can change organisational norms. No indications of behaviour change.	Political pressure from donors Reputational risk to make sure it delivers its commitments

These findings from ADB are consistent with what we know from EU's public policy literature. Rietig and Perkins (2018) recognized the multifaceted and uneven learning of different actors in their study of climate finance in the EU. SDCC staff have deeper understanding and appreciation of the goals. They serve as policy entrepreneurs in the organization, anchoring the ideas they promote to the Strategy 2030. Similarly, the EU practiced experiential learning more than factual and constructiv-

ist learning. International organizations such as the MDBs are knowledge producers so they tend to claim that they already know the idea proposed by the global agenda. A change of beliefs are also rarely reported. The differentiation between the different types of learning, also helped us to see how the goals affected the organization in different ways. For ADB, the application of a strategy that uses the goals tend to fall on experiential learning but knowing the outputs of the experience tend to fall as factual learning. Information and experience only changes the belief of the staff and the organization if it is classified as a success or a failure.

Another similar research finding is from Lindethal and Koch's (2011) study of environmental integration in the EU. The research analysed how the Directorates-General for Transport and Energy (DG TREN) and for Enterprise (DG ENTR) of the European Commission reacted to the demand to integrate environmental aspects into their activities. Like ADB, the environmental integration only became possible if it can be linked to the DG TREN's core convictions. Same way, the goals that were adopted in Strategy 2030 are those that are connected to ADB's mandate and key focus areas (i.e poverty eradication). They did not explicitly included plans related to human rights and peace. There are also interesting similarities as to how external pressure tends to create single-loop learning on the SDGs in ADB, whereby the goals and principles of governance are adopted in the strategy but act more as guidelines rather than changing the existing norms in the bank. Based on the details shared by the staff interviewed, both project officers and staff of SDCC, the long-term changes that leads to change in standards or double-loop learning are influenced more by the exchanges in knowledge and experience among the staff.

Third and probably one of the most similar in our discussion of the three types of learning is Radaelli's (2009) article on the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) in Europe where she also used different types of learning (e.g. emulation, political learning and instrumental learning). Based on his findings, the strongest learning effect is emulation followed by political learning. Diffusion of policies through emulation is triggered by the exchange of the networks in a multi-level system. ADB, like the EU, is a part of a multi-level network of MDBs and international development organizations that were given the responsibility to help support countries to achieve the SDGs. This kind of strong network exchanges and collaboration tend to create a diffusion of ideas and practices that facilitates the needed action on the goals. Political learning is also exercised by ADB where its adoption of the SDGs is motivated by a strategic, symbolic and substantial reason to affirm its leadership position in driving development. There is a reputational risk, peer-pressure and competition that needs to be managed by ADB as it learns from the goals.

Given the previous discussion, it is important to state at this point that learning exist as an intervening variable in ADB's response to goals-based governance of the SDGs. The only question left unanswered is to how important the SDGs in are facilitating the necessary changes required in the organization. Would the changes that ADB introduced under its Strategy 2030 have happened in the absence of the SDGs? The answer is no. Although the ideas that the goals carry have already been

existing in silos within the organization before the goals were created (e.g. mainstreaming gender equality and climate change), the SDGs serve as an important stimulus that facilitated organizational learning. Governance using the goals is both rule-making and norm-creation, depending who are involved. It might be proper to call it goal-guided learning in ADB rather than goals-based governance since the use goals is still in the process of experimentation. By looking more at goal-guided learning, the focus is on the types of learning occurring rather than being attached to the idea of whether the organization is fulfilling the requirements of goals-based governance. If we know what types of learning exist as a result of using the goals, we will be able to adjust our demands from organizations such as ADB if we want it to change its beliefs. Since learning from past experiences and knowledge exchanges are the two drivers of change for ADB, perhaps its stakeholders should be more open to mistakes from ADB and should be more willing to take risk in engaging with different stakeholders.

Conclusion and Outlook

A key question arising from this work is the relationship between corporate or collective learning and beliefs, and the beliefs and learning of the individuals that comprise that collectivity. We do not consider here, in detail, how far ADB's structure and values are matters of belief (and in what sense they can be said to be 'held' by the organization). Nor exactly how far, or how deeply, this organization's behavior and beliefs must be reflected in the beliefs of individuals. It might also be that 'culture' – in this case, the relatively hierarchical and rules-based makeup of ADB – interposes itself between individual and collective in an important way. There is an important set of ontological questions here for our account of individual and organizational learning that need further consideration. But this is also a question for goals-based governance. It might be that goals-based governance needs only experiential learning on the organizational level and compliance, mirrored in the compliance of individuals within these organizations. Would this emphasis on (albeit informal) expectations and compliance render governance by goals less distinctive as an approach? Lastly, the external components of ADB's learning, beyond the scope of this paper, are another important element. ADB's dealings with countries have prompted clashes between meeting targets and following country needs. Meeting the requirements of the SDGs and the expectations of the countries could be another learning experience that helped to develop constructivist learning over time.

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