**The SDGs’ Summit and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

By Matt Simonds

Leaders of United Nation Member States are set to endorse the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Framework (now to be called the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development)[[1]](#footnote-1) at the General Assembly on 25-27 September 2015. Following what has been a long and at times arduous process to develop and agree this framework, throughout which the Trade Union movement has been actively engaged, the Post-2015 Summit in September will no doubt go down as an historic event. There are definitely grounds for celebration, not least simply because an agreement was actually reached, signalling a win for multilateralism on the whole, but also because it represents the culmination of one of the most inclusive efforts by governments to include the voices of civil societies and other non-state, non-executive actors in an international agreement. It would be fair to say that this is reflected in the level of ambition achieved in key parts of the outcome. Nevertheless, some reservations and concerns remain.

**The Sustainable Development Goals (****SDGs) and Targets** are ambitious and the framework Preamble and Declaration are convincing calls to action on a vast and complicated agenda. Where the Post-2015 Framework is perhaps lacking in ambition is in its commitments to implement them through financing and progressive public policy, and its accountability framework.

For those not deeply involved in the last year of intergovernmental negotiations, the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets adopted last year by the Open Working Group (OWG) were more or less preserved. While there were some tweaks here and there, which were by no means trivial, they were not significant enough to damper the overall ambition of the package. The Preamble and Declaration of the Post-2015 framework parallels closely the ambition set out in the Goals and Targets and will serve as a useful rallying tool to solicit the support of broader audiences for the agenda. It is fair to say that the trade union movement’s broad objectives going into this process, Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for all and Universal Social Protection, Human Right to Water and Sanitation, Universal Free Quality Education, Health care for all, Gender Equality and reducing Income Inequality, are for the most part adequately reflected across the declaration and in the SDGs and Targets.

The trade union movement welcomes all goals in SDG framework, but is in particular committed to realizing goals to end poverty in all its forms (SDG 1), and in particular the target on social protection (1.3); to ensure quality education (SDG 4) and all of the corresponding targets; to achieve gender equality (SDG 5) and in particular targets to related domestic work (5.4) and women’s leadership (5.5); to promote decent work for all (SDG 8) and all of the corresponding targets; to reduce inequality (SDG 10), with particular emphasis on the target focused on fiscal, wage and social protection policies (10.4); and to ensure access to justice and rule of law (SDG 16) in particular the target to protect fundamental freedoms (16.10).

We are however less enthusiastic when it comes to the SDGs supporting framework, which is, in effect, the means to implement and effectively monitor them. **The Means of Implementation (MOI)[[2]](#footnote-2)** will likely be the subject of some confusion and contention in coming years, at least in terms of how this international agreement will be interpreted by the different poles of influence within the United Nations system. This due to the fact that there are divisions as to what will ultimately serve as the MOI for the SDGs.

The SDGs developed by the OWG and agreed by the General Assembly in September 2014 included a specific goal (SDG 17) and a number of MOI targets specific to each goal. Recently, in addition, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) was adopted at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (read the [Trade Union reaction](http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/trade_unions_reaction_to_ffd3_action_agenda_final.pdf)). Divisions exist among the UN membership concerning the linking between AAAA to the Post-2015 Framework, with the mainly OECD based countries insisting that the AAAA serve in its entirety as the MOI of the Post-2015, with G77 countries preferring to emphasize the earlier agreed SDG MOI Goal and the corresponding Targets.

From the perspective of the trade union movement, neither the MOI Goal nor the AAAA is particularly convincing, due to a lack of coherence or concreteness. Nevertheless, the AAAA is less fit to support the Post-2015 Framework and should remain a distinct international agreement with its own process for follow up.

That said, and in reality, the distinction may have little relevance when it comes to the actual implementation, and it will be more important to ensure that governments and all stakeholders are ultimately held accountable for the commitments that have been made under the Post-2015 framework. In this regard the monitoring and accountability process is fundamental.

**The Follow Up and Review Process** as it is called remains an entirely voluntary endeavour from national to global level. While we feel there is still much that can be accomplished through a progressive and comprehensive set of indicators which will be developed to assess progress at the global level, we believe governments could have reached greater ambition in particular in the follow up and review, through binding commitments based on existing international standards. For the trade union movement this is regrettable. Global accountability is crucial to ensure fairer and more equitable governance in development, which ensures better policy coherence for development. Compulsory monitoring, if not binding commitments, would at least go some way to ensuring that behaviour across actors contributes positively to the totality of objectives.

Nevertheless, perhaps because the follow up and review lacks strict reporting requirements there remains some flexibility and ability to influence the overall process. For example, the High Level Political Forum, the main body for review at global level is meant to be an apex body which integrates existing monitoring and accountability mechanisms. Here then the ILO framework can serve as a ‘living’ example on how accountability mechanisms can work at global level through to the national level but more importantly can be integrated into the overall assessments on progress. Likewise the ILO supervisory machinery may be utilized in efforts to achieve relevant goals and targets.

Similarly, we must continue to insist and ensure that at the national level the review process is genuinely participatory. In this light, social dialogue, which brings together the social partners, employers’ and workers’ organizations, is an excellent example of how to ensure ownership of policy processes at the national level and should be utilized and promoted wherever and whenever possible.

It is also of utmost importance that the follow up and review integrate instruments to hold business accountable at all levels. Over the course of the negotiations, the union movement has voiced its concerns that the biggest interest of involving business in development relates to investment in infrastructure, the delivery of aid through private partners and a wholesale promotion of PPPs. Therefore, the follow up and review mechanism must also assess private sectors contribution to sustainable development objectives, including through adherence to international labour and environmental standards.

1. <http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/L.85&Lang=E> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Means of Implementation refers to both the financial and non-financial resources available to implement the Goals and Targets (or objectives). This can include, for example, Official Development Assistance or Foreign Direct Investment (financial means), or undertake pro-employment macroeconomic policies or adopt legislation that gives woman equal access to economic resources (non-financial). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)