

Civil society position paper on UNECE regional HLPF consultation (10 of May 2016 – Geneva)

Introduction: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are undeniably a step forward compared to Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) both in terms of the process to develop them and in their universality, scope and ambition, and in particular their potential for tackling inequality and environmental degradation.
- One of the main aims of the negotiations leading up to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was to develop a comprehensive, ambitious and integrated framework, such that all 3 dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental) are represented, preferably within each goal area and are linked to each other across the framework. This has been, up to a point, achieved. It must therefore be retained, respected and reflected in the monitoring, review and accountability processes and mechanisms that are set up. It will be critical to measure and ensure that progress in one area of the framework does not undermine progress elsewhere in the framework in any way. This means that *how* a target is reached is as important as whether it is reached.
- Linked to this is the concept of Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD), which is a key element of accountability for the comprehensive, ambitious and integrated framework of the 2030 Agenda, since it is one of the key enabling factors for realising it. PCSD is a necessary bridge between the principles and indivisible goals. As a principle it essentially prescribes that states must take into account the impact their policies and actions have on people's prospects for sustainable development and countries' ability to realise their people's human rights within planetary boundaries. It speaks to the need for states to mitigate any potentially negative impact they may have and to provide redress for those impacts that are proven to have been detrimental to groups of people or other countries. Civil society is committed to realising goals and targets to end poverty, foster decent work and labour standards, ensure quality education, provide public services, achieve human rights, reduce inequalities, champion women's rights and environmental justice.
- In the UNECE region, there are some difficult challenges like the growing inequality gap, achieving tax justice, lack of respect for human rights, the refugee crisis, and increasing environmental pressure. All countries from Canada to Kazakhstan need to do their share and make changes to lifestyles and economic practices.
- The Decent Work Agenda, with its 4 pillars (workers' rights, social protection, employment and social dialogue), is one of the tools to fight both poverty and inequality. Trade unions advocate for the implementation of indicators on decent work, specifically on collective bargaining, wages and social dialogue.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: monitoring, review and accountability

- Civil society regrets the lack of ambition in the monitoring, review and accountability in current proposals for the HLPF – and particularly the lack of real accountability, given that the focus is on sharing of good practices. We would like to see more emphasis on monitoring and accountability through binding commitments, based on existing international standards and agreements.
- Despite a laudable set of principles that countries should aspire to respect when developing “follow up and review” processes, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development does not propose robust mechanisms which allow civil society and individuals to hold international institutions or their governments to account for implementation. Robust, independent accountability mechanisms from local to regional level are crucial.
- It is worthwhile highlighting that the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA), which complements and supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, calls for improved accountability in a number of areas, not least in the context of the role and responsibilities of the private sector, public-private partnerships, financial institutions, philanthropic organisations and through the transparent provision of information and data.
- For an effective monitoring and accountability, we should urgently start with developing national and local overarching strategies for the SDGs implementation, including concrete action plans with targets and timelines. It is obvious that all stakeholders need to be fully involved in the process of such a planning, and that the SDG implementation is monitored at the highest political level.
- We need to ensure that plans for implementing the SDGs are covering all SDGs and not only those for which already budgets exist from public and private sector, but also reallocating budget to goals such as: 1) goal 10 on reducing inequalities within countries — inequalities are on the rise in all countries including the wealthiest and 2) goal 5 on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls - women’s unpaid care work, violence against women, ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights, low participation of women in decision making in public and private sectors remain a great challenge in all UNECE countries and 3) goal 16 on peaceful societies, reduce illicit financial flows, good governance and access to justice.
- The review process at national level, in all countries, should be genuinely participatory, with multi stakeholder dialogue as condition to ensure ownership of policy processes. Decent work, social protection and social dialogue are integral means and ends to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. For that social dialogue, which brings together social partners, employers’ and workers’ organizations, is an excellent example of ownership of policy processes at the national level. Freedom of association and right to collective bargaining are key for this partnership to work.
- UNECE Member States must show leadership in strengthening existing and designing new participatory processes, which will enable the public and organised civil society alike to contribute to and influence the design and implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all stages and to engage in a systematic way in monitoring, review and accountability processes.

- The creation of multiple participatory review mechanisms at all levels from local to regional will therefore be necessary in order to be inclusive of all people, including those who are the hardest to reach. Examples of such mechanisms include social audits, scorecards, surveys and online polling. In this way, qualitative data will complement quantitative data. Clearly, freedom of the media and full transparency and availability of information to all actors is a sine qua non for people to engage in monitoring and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- The monitoring, review and accountability processes must not focus exclusively on the achievement of the SDGs, important though this is. They must also include a focus on the key principles that underpin the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, such as redistribution of wealth, inter-generational equity and respect for planetary boundaries. Similarly, they must focus on the effort states have made to assist other countries achieve the SDGs in their context through the Means of Implementation.
- All States should be held accountable for whether they have set aside the requisite financial resources - "to the maximum extent possible" - for achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in their own context (domestically). This should be set out in National Strategies and Action Plans to guide states' implementation of the Agenda.
- Appropriate and ambitious indicators should be developed on all levels, which will guide the member states in their reporting and for which they will be held accountable. The differentiation principle inherent to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development expects different levels of achievement to be set by different countries and thus necessitates differentiated indicators, taking into account the different contexts and realities. It is important that UNECE Member States commit to ensure the highest level of ambition when setting national indicators based on the global ones. These indicators must ensure that a focus on the most marginalised is maintained. All countries must be expected to collect disaggregated data in order to monitor progress in closing the gaps in equality between people and countries, maintaining and improving ecosystems and staying within the fair share of the ecological footprint.
- Frequency of reporting – We do not believe that reporting only twice over the lifetime of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is adequate. We would propose a minimum of every 5 years, along the lines of country reporting to UN Human Rights mechanisms.
- As the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is most of all a policy and political agenda, it is key that States are the primary duty-bearers for a successful implementation. States are the bodies that decide on the rules of the game, governance and legal frameworks. This all is crucial to realise the transformation towards sustainable societies and economies, and phase out the unsustainable practices.
- In case of partnerships it should be in a fully transparent manner, with a clear terms of reference for what is expected of all parties, which is available to the public. Any actor that is called upon by a state to contribute to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development must be held fully accountable for their part against international standards and guidelines on human rights, decent work and environmental sustainability and justice, at the very minimum. There is currently a considerable gap in effective mandatory accountability mechanisms in the area of corporate transparency and accountability.

- The National Councils for Sustainable Development (NCSs) should serve as an important mechanism for coordination and monitoring the SDG implementation process, Review of national experience in National Councils and National Strategies for Sustainable Development in the UN ECE member states could make SDG implementation process in the region more effective.
- Wide public awareness campaign on SDGs and its importance should be supported, together with an integration in educational curricula to create wide ownership of the implementation and follow up.

Means of Implementation (MoI) and Financing for Development (FfD)

- Civil society is very concerned about the **privatisation of the sustainable development agenda**. The private sector is not a viable alternative to the state to provide human rights, for instance related to the access to basic needs and public services. Unconditional criteria are needed to ensure that private sector intervention is in line with the public interest, especially this is supported by public resources. Efforts for more inclusion should also include more accountability of the private sector.
- In the same line we reaffirm our doubts on the accountability and responsibility of the private sector in the wake of innovative financing instruments such as “blending” and “public private partnerships” (PPPs). There is little evidence which suggests that PPPs contribute to sustainable development. We insist on a more balanced approach in terms of the provision of public services that are managed publicly.
- We also insist that private sector and wealthy individuals pay their taxes, just as any other responsible citizen. No more #PanamaPapers.
- Domestic Resource Mobilization is a powerful tool to redistribute wealth and promote equality. This has to be done through: progressive fiscal policies and tax justice, including effective taxation of multinational corporate activities, and fighting tax evasion and avoidance, and ban tax havens.
- Civil society raise concerns around different clauses within trade agreements, which instead of promoting the development of countries can undermine state sovereignty and violate labour rights.
- While there are clearly overlaps, the FfD agenda goes further than that of the MoI in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They must therefore remain distinct processes, although totally compatible with each other.