
Reflection Group on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Monitoring and advocacy for structural transformation in the context of the 2030 Agenda

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – a new start towards global sustainability?

1 The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted at the highest level in September 2015 by the heads of states and governments of the world at the UN has the potential to change the prevailing development paradigm by re-emphasizing the **multidimensional** character of sustainable development and its **universal** applicability.

2 The 2030 Agenda offers the opportunity to **correct the errors and omissions** of the MDG approach – an approach that has reduced the development discourse to the focusing on the symptoms of extreme poverty and the provision of basic social services in poor countries. While – without doubt – these issues are important, the MDG approach failed to address adequately the structural flaws of the global economic and financial systems, the imperative of ecological sustainability and the responsibilities of the global North.

3 The 2030 Agenda offers the opportunity to respond in an integrated manner to **urgent global problems**, such as accelerating global warming and growing inequalities. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contained in the 2030 Agenda incorporate a commitment to reduce inequalities within and among countries, a clear demand for sustainable consumption and production patterns and the aspiration for fair governance and justice. The 2030 Agenda is universal, not just because the SDGs have global scope, but also because all countries have to do something to achieve them. No country can deem itself to be sustainably developed and having already done its part to meet the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda offers the opportunity to challenge the idea that development is a phenomenon that occurs only in countries of the Southern hemisphere while the North is already “developed”.

4 However, the 2030 Agenda is **not free of contradictions** and inadequately addresses certain goals and targets, particularly when it comes to their means of implementation. The 2030 Agenda is a compromise among 193 governments and far from perfect. But for the first time in an

intergovernmental document, it acknowledges the “enormous disparities of opportunity, wealth and power” as immense challenge to sustainable development.

5 **Overcoming gender inequality** requires challenging economic policies and institutions that have entrenched social inequalities and undermined the capacity of States to meet their commitments to women’s rights. Among these challenges are the root causes to poverty, including the role that women’s unpaid work – which some estimate at 60 percent of the value generated globally – plays in subsidizing entire economies. In that regard, feminist economists point out that the state needs to play a key role in facilitating a development strategy characterized by greater equality with attention to the sustainability goals.

6 There are further **severe obstacles** to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and overcoming them is a prerequisite for achieving the SDGs and fulfilling the commitments made to human rights and sustainability:

- For too long, economic policies have been shaped by **corporate interest groups** outlining neoliberal policies »*without alternatives*«. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda should lead to structural transformations instead of being led by the interests and advice of those governments, interest groups and institutions which have taken us down paths that are unsustainable and caused the obstacles to the implementation of an ambitious agenda.
- All too often inequitable **trade, investment and monetary rules** and policies have exacerbated poverty and inequalities between and in all countries, both in the global North and South.
- The **obsession with growth**, backed up by the dominant economic regime, provides the drive to exploit nature, relies on fossil fuels and depletes biodiversity, undermining the provision of essential services.
- Countries compete in a **race to the bottom**, offering lower taxes and cheaper labour so as to attract investments. Tax havens allow for tax evasion.
- Bilateral and regional **investment and trade agreements** as well as the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) have undermined social, environmental and human rights standards and they have reduced the policy space of governments.
- These policies have strengthened the **power of investors and big corporations** through deregulation, trade and financial liberalization, tax cuts and exemptions, and they have weakened the role of the state and its ability to promote human rights and sustainability.

7 That is why there is the **need for a strong presence of progressive civil society organizations** to address systemic issues, structural obstacles and contradictions in the 2030 Agenda, shaping the discourse around that Agenda and monitoring its implementation.

2. Monitoring and review – indispensable elements of the 2030 Agenda

8 The political effectiveness of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs depends on the adoption of appropriate strategies and policies, available resources and other means of implementation.

Accountability mechanisms are important tools for strengthening political commitment and effectiveness. Thus the successful process relies a lot on adopting mechanisms for the monitoring of progress or regressive developments in achieving the goals.

9 The 2030 Agenda includes a special chapter on “**follow-up and review**” at national, regional and global levels. Governments agreed only to the voluntary sharing of experiences and peer learning and failed to agree on an effective intergovernmental monitoring mechanism, building, for instance, on the experience of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in the human rights field.

10 It is particularly worrying that in some cases not only the implementation of certain goals and targets but also their monitoring is being outsourced to “**partnerships**” involving funders, corporations, foundations and civil society organizations. This self-monitoring undermines independent and objective assessment.

11 In addition, monitoring and review should not be reduced to the implementation of the SDGs and their related targets. Previous experience clearly shows that monitoring of outputs or outcomes alone is by no means sufficient. Rather, **policies and policy changes** (and not just outcomes), in the follow-up and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda should be scrutinized. These analyses are by their very nature **qualitative** rather than purely quantitative.

12 Monitoring should strive to zero in on **interdependencies** among policies and their outcomes. Actions do have consequences—and sometimes, they can be directly connected (as in the case of value chains), while in other cases, effects may be spatially and temporally disconnected, but causal all the same (as with climate change).

13 Finally, monitoring and review should include the **structural obstacles** to the implementation of the SDGs and disclose the actors and vested interests behind them.

14 Civil society organizations have to play a key role as **independent watchdogs** in holding governments, international organizations, International Financial Institutions and Multilateral Development Banks as well as transnational corporations accountable for their (positive or negative) contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This is particularly relevant with regard to the rich and powerful actors in the global system, given their economic influence and political weight in international decision making.

3. From reflection to action – what, where and how to monitor?

15 **CSO monitoring efforts** on the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs will cover a full range of activities at national, regional, constituency, thematic and sectoral levels.

16 However, monitoring the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda will not be confined to goals, targets, and indicators; **analyzing principles and policies** is equally important, as is attention to the role and influence of the rich and powerful, globally, nationally and institutionally.

17 The **Civil Society Reflection Group on Global Development Perspectives** has worked together for several years to look beyond conventional development concepts and goals, to rethink the models and measures of sustainable development and social progress – in the North and the South, and to address some formidable barriers, such as the fragmentation of policy processes, the lack of policy coherence, and the influence of corporate vested interests. We summarized our analyses and findings in the comprehensive report “No future without justice” (June 2012). Some of our key recommendations were further elaborated in a discussion paper outlining the “Framework of Universal Sustainability Goals as Part of a Post-2015 Agenda” (May 2013). In particular the roles and responsibilities of the rich and powerful global actors were highlighted in “Goals for the Rich. Indispensable for a Universal Post-2015 Agenda” (March 2015).

18 In light of the need for independent CSO monitoring and advocacy in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, a **new 2030 watch initiative**, based on the experiences and analyses of the Reflection Group, is proposed to enhance concerted action in the 2030 process.

19 The new initiative will concentrate on **inequalities, sustainable production and consumption, means of implementation and systemic issues**, the resolution of which are necessary (though not sufficient) conditions for implementing the 2030 Agenda.

20 It will not only focus on policy incoherence, but analyze and assess the extent to which policies are **framed by the ambitious principles** of the Agenda, particularly the human rights framework, and the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities. In addition it will articulate and advocate for missing principles and policies and the provision of “maximum available resources” in accordance with the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

21 Given their abilities and weight in international decision making, **rich country governments** will be at the center of our monitoring and advocacy efforts.

22 The **United Nations** has a central role to play in implementing the 2030 Agenda. This requires adequate and predictable financial contributions from public sources. The initiative will assess funding patterns and their implications, especially with regard to the growing influence of the corporate sector and corporate philanthropy.

23 The initiative will further analyze “**multi-stakeholder partnerships**” that are being promoted as mechanisms for implementation of the 2030 Agenda despite their immanent risk of further weakening or bypassing public institutions and privileging corporate actors.

24 The initiative aims to develop different kinds of outputs, including

- **Periodic spotlight reports** assessing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the structural obstacles in its realization with a particular focus on the rich and powerful;
- **Briefing papers and studies** analyzing the impact of current policies on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and outlining policy alternatives;
- **Indicators/Indices** for (i) measuring the role of the rich and powerful in the 2030 Agenda and reporting on these; (ii) measuring issues beyond the SDGs (structural questions, framework conditions; left out issues, e.g., arms trade etc.);
- **A continually updated website** with reports, briefings, blogs, statistics, links to social media etc.

25 Additionally, the initiative aims to provide **spaces for joint analysis, reflection and strategy development** in order to enhance the policy advocacy role of (global) civil society, for instance through workshops, strategy and networking meetings. This can lead to joint activities, advocacy and campaigning of like-minded civil society groups and networks at national, regional and global level.

4. Key political venues and entry points 2016

26 Among the processes and arenas with importance to the monitoring and implementation of the 2030 Agenda are the following.

- The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), the envisaged center for the monitoring and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda at global level;
- The Regional Commissions of the UN and other regional bodies and groupings, that will serve as venues for regional monitoring and follow-up;
- The Financing for Development Forum, which will host the follow-up on the means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda and the outcomes of the International Conferences on Financing for Development (FfD) of Monterrey, Doha and Addis Ababa;
- The UN Forum on Business and Human Rights and related Human Rights Council processes and procedures;
- The proceedings and meetings of other major UN bodies and entities especially of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies and

functional commissions, such as the UN Statistical Commission and the Commission on the Status of Women;

- The meetings and proceedings of the World Trade Organization;
- The meetings and proceedings of the Bretton Woods Institutions and other multilateral development banks;
- The negotiations around proposed free trade and investment protection areas and agreements such as TPP, TISA, and TTIP;
- The meetings and decisions of the G20 and G7/8 and other groupings.

27 The initiative will engage in selected arenas and processes on the global and – where appropriate – regional or national levels, especially the **HLPF** and **FfD Forum**. It will not limit itself to arenas and processes that are generic parts of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, but will approach also those with potentially large spill-overs to the fulfillment of that Agenda.

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