



No. 5 – November 2015

## The 2030 Agenda: Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within Government, Business & Civil Society

The RIO + 20 Report ‘The Future We Want’ established a mandate to develop a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs) and appropriate action that is coherent with and integrated into the UN development agenda. A United Nations Summit for the post-2015 development agenda was held from 25 to 27 September 2015 in New York. It was a high-level plenary meeting of the UN General Assembly.

In this context, the GEPP Policy Dialogue organised on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2015 aimed to address the key challenges of implementing and monitoring the SDGs at a time when political commitment and resource allocation is problematic. The invited panelists expressed their viewpoint and debated the following questions with the audience:

- How will the universality of the 17 SDGs be applied in practice in developed countries and who will be responsible for implementing them?
- Are the SDGs applicable as such or will adjustments be needed at regional, and sub-regional or metropolitan levels before their implementation?
- How can the SDGs be financed? Can stakeholders from the financial and insurance sectors be encouraged to contribute?
- What methods and tools can be applied to monitor the SDGs and who is responsible for this task?
- What lessons can be learnt from the achievements and limitations of MDGs?

**Mr. Jan Dusik** (UNEP Regional Chair Office) served as Chair of this panel and gave the introductory speech from the position of UNEP. **Ambassador Michael Gerber** (Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs), presented the position of Switzerland regarding the 2030 Agenda, before **Ms. Carina Larsfalten** (Managing Director Global Policy and Strategic Partnerships, World Business Council for Sustainable Development WBCSD) and **Mr. Arthur Dahl** (President, International Environment Forum) commented with the view of their respective organisations.

### A New Integrated Agenda

In the course of the last two years, we have witnessed one of the most unprecedented processes of public engagement and intense processes of Member States in developing the SDGs across the globe. That work has come to an end as of 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2015, with an agreed consensus draft outcome document titled, “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets.

Looking at the current set of SDGs, half of them directly focus on environmental issues or address the sustainability of natural resources: from poverty to food and agriculture, to water and sanitation, to energy, human settlements, SCP, climate change, oceans, terrestrial ecosystems. At the same time, over 86 of the targets concern environmental sustainability, including at least one in each of the 17 SDGs.

One the main lessons learnt from the implementation process of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was the need for a different form of solidarity and long term solution portfolios that addressed the root cause of the problems. For the SDGs, these portfolios must be comprised of an integrated agenda with economic, environmental and social solutions. This can only be achieved through the collaborative action of governments, the private sector and civil society in creating new types of partnerships.

### The Government Perspective

There is a general consensus that government must champion their successful implementation as the institutions who were ultimately responsible for the development of the SDGs. For individual governments, the challenge is translating the global goals to a regional and national context in a way that is transparent and inclusive of their citizen’s interests. There is a significant amount of complexity built into the architecture of the process (partnerships, financing, reviews, reporting) at the international level. Therefore governance processes and capacity building at the national level will be required to ensure that no countries are left behind.



The new global partnership dimension of the SDGs is novel and governments will have a key role to play instigating productive partnerships that avoid duplication of effort and ensure coherent strategies among a diverse group of stakeholders.

## The Civil Society Perspective

It is clear that society is shifting away from economic measures of development to human-centered measures and value-based indicators. The SDGs are not just aimed at government but all other actors, including civil society. Nested structures of responsibility for implementation will be required as some things are just not possible to achieve only by policy. A key challenge for engaging civil society in delivery of the SDGs will be to take the very impressive process and translate them into a language that people will identify with and adhere to. Additionally, it is important to recognize that a large part of humanity simply will not care about the goals and will be motivated by forces that work counter to them so our strategies must assume such.

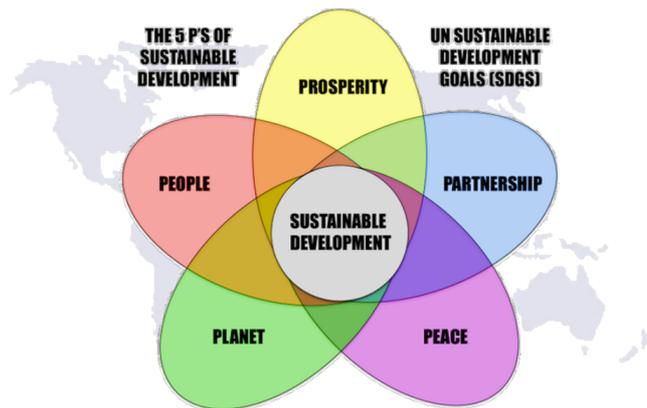
The United Nations process is essentially top-down, building a global consensus among governments. The SDGs need to be appropriated by individuals, communities and civil society to start a bottom-up process, translating the goals into implementation at the local level.

## The Road Ahead: Challenges & Opportunities

While there is much to be gained from the implementation of the SDGs, there are still challenges that need to be addressed such as:

- How to keep the focus on the SDGs despite other global challenges ahead?
- What can be done to fill all the gaps in the targets and indicators?
- How can the SDGs be translated into actions that people can integrate in their own lives and communities?

In light of these challenges, the opportunity to have successful implementation of the SDGs lies within the universality of the agenda: the problems, challenges and opportunities are not limited to one region, one country, or one sector of society (eg. Agriculture or industrial production). Both their nature and impacts are interrelated. If this is indeed a shared agenda, then a collective course of action and implementation is required.



**Fig. 1.** The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Source: UN website: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>).

## The Business Perspective

The sheer amount of capital required for implementing the SDGs makes the private sector extremely important to this process, as business is the more efficient way to move capital. Additionally, the way businesses source, invest, employ and spend all have significant influence on sustainable development. Achieving corporate buy-in is about proving the business case rather than the merits of SDGs. Supporting proof of this case will involve communicating that the SDGs will provide the private sector with numerous practical advantages and business opportunities including:

- Global roadmap & momentum
- Redirects & focuses investment flows
- Defines markets
- Defines trends & future policies
- Provides a common language
- Opportunity to strengthen a company's license to operate
- Unified & shared framework across all dimensions of sustainable development and a platform for multi-stakeholder efforts & partnerships

