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- Danish CSOs for Development Cooperation

The Danish 92 Group



Forum for Sustainable Development

Nordic CSO platforms' input for UN Secretary General's Report on follow-up and review of Agenda 2030

We write to you as members of the Nordic civil society. We welcome that the UN Secretary General will put forward a report to outline “critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level”. As representatives of Nordic civil society organizations, we are convinced that in order to achieve the transformative shift to sustainable development that Agenda 2030 sets out, we need to create robust and participatory monitoring, follow-up and accountability mechanisms. We welcome the opportunity to present the following recommendations.

Robust and accountable follow-up and review mechanisms

The lack of defined accountability architecture has been identified as a key reason for some of the shortfalls in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We cannot afford this to happen again.

The UN Secretary-General has said that a new paradigm of accountability is in fact “*the real test of people-centered, planet-sensitive development*”¹. Although the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are not legally binding, robust monitoring and accountability should be considered an integral part of the Agenda, and must not be treated as an optional or onerous add-on. The ambition of the Agenda can only be achieved if regular, transparent and robust reviews of progress and setbacks are conducted. The reviews must be conducted in an inclusive and participatory way, bringing all stakeholders together.

The mechanisms for follow-up and review must allow for all people to hold their leaders accountable for the commitments they have made. The main purpose of the reviews should be to review member states' compliance to the Agenda. The reviews must be also conducted at the national levels in a way that allows for comparison across countries and goal areas at the global level.

The follow up and review must respect, assess and safeguard the core principles of Agenda 2030, including universality, human rights, participation, accountability and equality and non-discrimination, poverty eradication, protecting the planet, and integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

¹ UN Secretary-General, *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet* (2015)

Importantly, the follow-up and review must also be people-centered and ensure that no-one is left behind. Disaggregation of data will be essential.

A first step to creating national follow-up and review mechanisms is for member states to develop ambitious national action plans for the SDGs and targets. The Nordic countries can support this by pushing for state-led reviews at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) and by supporting peer reviews of national progress in their own countries; while at the same time propose that peer reviews become a key component of the global follow-up and review.

We suggest that each member state be reviewed three times 2016-2030, in order to ensure regular follow-up and progress. The first review will largely focus on reviewing the national plans and initial progress, while the following two reviews will allow for comparison across countries and goal areas, and provide recommendations for the next phase.

A well-resourced, proactive and participatory High-Level Political Forum

We welcome the UN General Assembly resolution 67/290 stating that the HLPF will serve as the apex body within the United Nations system to review sustainable development process, which includes being the venue for follow-up and review process in the implementation of sustainable development commitments. Further, it is important to foster a culture of universal participation: although the High-Level Political Forum reviews will be voluntary, participation by all Member States should be expected and incentivized. The Nordic countries can lead this to become reality at the global level by showing their own commitment to this in their national contexts. In order to ensure comprehensive reviews, the HLPF reviews must be complemented and informed by efforts at the national and regional levels, as well as global thematic review bodies that are mandated to look at overall progress and bottlenecks on specific goals.

The Nordic countries must commit to ensuring that the HLPF is sufficiently resourced and supported to perform this role. This will include allocating sufficient/enough time for meetings, a permanent secretariat with the necessary capacity and expertise to coordinate and prepare the work of the HLPF and to support periodic thematic and country reviews of the SDGs.

The HLPF review process must not exist in a vacuum, but instead be connected with other existing review mechanisms and strengthen the interlinkages with other global processes. We must make use of and take inspiration from existing mechanisms when creating mechanisms for follow-up and review of the SDGs. One good example of such review mechanisms is the Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council, which is the review mechanism set up to review the human rights records of all UN member states.

The process to develop and agree on Agenda 2030 has been called the biggest and most inclusive global consultation to date. The real test of the inclusiveness starts now when we move from words to actions. The follow-up and review of the Agenda must continue in the same participatory spirit. Civil society and other stakeholders must be meaningfully engaged in the implementation and follow-up if we want to achieve the ambition set out in Agenda 2030. A people-centered agenda must allow people and civil society to actively participate in the reviews, as well as to submit alternative and independent reports. Therefore, it is important to make sure that the HLPF enables the participation of a wide range of actors and individuals, particularly those experiencing poverty, inequality and marginalization. Civil society can bring real expertise and should be allowed to play a full and active role as experts and decision-shapers at all levels.

UN General Assembly Resolution 67/290, gives the representatives of Major Groups and other Stakeholders

a number of specific participatory privileges and responsibilities. These must be respected and guaranteed. In order to do so, simple processes must be set up to facilitate the contributions by civil society and other stakeholders at the global, regional and national level reviews. Interactive dialogue must take place, with the purpose of reviewing each member state's progress in implementing the Agenda. This can be done by ensuring that thematic and country reviews are open to civil society input, and stakeholder reports are compiled by the HLPF Secretariat, and by guaranteeing that civil society can submit documents and present written and oral contributions to the HLPF. In addition, civil society organizations should be permitted to participate in interactive dialogues within the HLPF, and a trust fund should be established to support travel and technology for online participation. The model of openness and participation of the Open Working Group on the SDGs should be the basis for the work of the HLPF.

The HLPF should also create spaces for review of progress towards achieving the SDGs made by other actors than member states, including the private sector and UN agencies. Other actors, particularly the private sector, will have impacts on the progress of achieving the Agenda and must therefore also be subject to scrutiny to guard against potential adverse impacts. The various new partnerships within the renewed global partnership must also be evaluated based on their effectiveness and impact.

Achieving the ambition set out in the Agenda will require financial resources. UNCTAD has estimated that we need to mobilise \$3.3-4.5 trillion a year, in order to achieve the 17 sustainable development goals in the developing countries. With the current levels of financing for development, there is currently a gap of \$2.5 trillion every year². Facing these resource needs and implementation challenges, it is utmostly regrettable that Finland, Norway, Denmark and Sweden are considering substantial cuts or inflation to their ODA funding. It is morally unacceptable that these cuts are taken while simultaneously giving the impression of being serious about the development paradigm shift towards a sustainable development.

Universality and Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development

Accountability of Agenda 2030 is a matter of universality, not conditionality. It is crucial that the emphasis on the concept of universality is reflected throughout the process of follow-up and review. All countries – rich and poor alike – are obliged to be involved and committed to a strong implementation and follow up at the sub-national, national, regional and global level. The success of the goals depends on the delivery of all countries, which includes action both domestically and globally. For example, while the Nordic countries have a high score on human development, our activities have a high environmental cost, which reflects the need to take action in these areas. Progress must be tracked in all countries, across all goal areas, in an integrated approach. All countries must participate and provide feedback as equals in reviewing their differentiated responsibilities for meeting the commitments made in the Agenda.

The mechanisms at the global level should also examine member state's progress on the SDGs beyond their borders, for example, in areas like trade, tax and the environment, which have major impacts on other countries' abilities to develop sustainably and fulfill human rights commitments.

Policy coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) is a critical enabling condition to the achievement of sustainable development. For rich countries like the Nordic ones, this implies that policy coherence for sustainable development must be achieved. Review mechanisms must be set up to review all countries' internal and external actions, in order to ensure that all policy areas are delivering towards the realization of the commitments made in the Agenda and for sustainable development in all its dimensions.

² UNCTAD (2014): Developing countries face \$ 2.5 trillion annual investment gap in key sustainable development sectors. <http://unctad.org/en/pages/PressRelease.aspx?OriginalVersionID=194>