

BACKGROUND NOTE

COMMITMENT 2030: GLOBAL AGENDAS FOR THE PEOPLE

Wednesday 17 January 2018

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the Sustainable Development Agenda after a long period of reflection on the basis of the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals. The new agenda implies a more complex international development process, which includes a multidimensional vision of development, with a more horizontal, peer-to-peer perspective, thus breaking the limited vertical and donor-recipient vision of the MDGs.

Despite the undoubted achievements made in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals, it is worth remembering that important challenges persist: more than 700 million people remain below the extreme poverty line, 793 million suffer from malnutrition, and 155 million children under 5 years old suffer from stunting. In 2015, 5.9 million children under the age of five years old died, most of them due to preventable causes. It is estimated that 3 million people died from diseases attributable to environmental pollution caused by traffic and the burning or inadequate treatment of waste. Since 2008, progress in the universalization of basic education seems to have slowed, and today 9% of children in schooling age do not attend school. One out of every 5 women in relationship was subjected to physical or sexual violence by their intimate partner. More than 2 billion people live in areas affected by water stress and it is estimated that by 2030, 40% of the world's water needs might not be adequately met.

The Sustainable Development Agenda was born with the intention of promoting a development model that undertakes the necessary reforms to face these challenges and many others, putting people at the centre of the action programs, under the principle of "leaving no one behind".

The ODS are based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, calling the whole international community, including the governments as well as private and social actors, to pursue sustainable human development focused on the needs of people, while not compromising the ones of future generations, as pointed out by the Brundtland Commission on Sustainable Development. The challenges do not only concern the developing countries, but also the industrialized ones: in the European Union, 118 million people, around 23.7% of the population, were in 2015 at risk of poverty or social exclusion. 17 million young people between 20 and 34 years old do neither study nor work. 7.4% of Europeans and Europeans who want to work cannot find a job.

The potential of the SDGs will be fully deployed as much as the structures for their implementation are forged in an enduring manner. This implies a review of its governance, including an evaluation of the alliances at territorial level, where the contributions of each of the involved actors are placed pursuing mutual enrichment and generation of synergies. The Sustainable Development Agenda is more complex and exhaustive than the previous action programs approved by the United Nations, as they include more physical and environmental dimensions, and they must also seek coordination with other international commitments such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change or the New Urban Agenda, with which they feed back.

We are thus faced with a series of important challenges for the proper implementation of the agenda, among which the following should be highlighted:

- The Sustainable Development Agenda must place people at the heart of economic development: GDP growth that does not contribute to the resolution of the concrete problems of most people not only adds little to social development, but it can also be a source of new inequalities and frustrations. This reality implies rethinking how we produce and distribute our production. Globally, the international economic crisis has left many wounds, many of them open and unresolved, in terms of employment or social fragility. The SDGs should contribute to a new post-crisis growth model that reduces the abovementioned wounds and encourages a more balanced and sustainable growth model, with better social bases, avoiding new inequalities and risks. However, this will not be achieved if the Sustainable Development Agenda remains at the periphery of the formulation of economic policies. It is essential to achieve the commitment of the departments of economy and finance.
- The SDGs are the result of a multipolar era where the relationship between industrialized, emerging and developing countries has changed, demanding new formulas for a more democratic and inclusive international governance, with greater capacity for generating international consensus, in the search for the provision of global public goods. However, it would be unrealistic to consider that the new model for a more democratic governance will be well received by all international actors. International geopolitical challenges and tensions remain and they can hinder the full implementation of the agenda. The necessary multilateral coordination clashes with the growing concern for the recovery of national sovereignty, in a context where the level of commitment of the countries with the Agenda is uneven. Transnational networks, generation of knowledge communities, and creation of international groups with specific interests can strengthen the links between societies, and therefore they can facilitate a more balanced and horizontal international governance. The role of regional organizations in structuring this new scenario is vital.

- This new growth model is only possible with the active participation of all the relevant actors: companies, civil society, public authorities and non-organized citizens. It is necessary to consider new models of public-private-social alliances which would be capable of generating scalable solutions and maximizing the contribution of each one of the actors. The capacity building for the design and management of these plural alliances should be a priority. The Agenda demands a strong leadership while it needs a new distribution of internal power among the different actors. This double need leads to the promotion of a new conception of multilevel governance, with a much more distributed and collaborative conception of power.