



The Sustainable Development Goals

17 New Sustainable Development Goals

At the end of September 2015, after years of international negotiations, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At its heart are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are to be implemented by 2030. They build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were agreed in 2000 and were to have been achieved by the end of 2015. Yet 1.2 billion people still live on less than USD 1.25 a day and almost 800 million people are suffering from hunger. Since not all of the Millennium Development Goals have been achieved and important aspects have been ignored, the new Sustainable Development Goals go much further. Combining social, ecological and economic sustainability they call for peace, rule of law and an independent judiciary. Due to their universal nature they apply equally to industrial and emerging countries and to the Global South.

The precursors: Millennium Development Goals

The eight Millennium Development Goals are considered the first catalogue of common targets that were to be achieved by the international community. However, in many ways they did not go far enough.

Although the requirements laid down in the Millennium Development Goals were meant to apply to all countries, they almost exclusively stipulate tasks to be fulfilled by developing countries - in part with financial support from the other countries. Most of the MDGs were development objectives, which ignored the environmental dimension of sustainability. The eight goals concentrated on fighting poverty, developing healthcare and providing access to education. Only one goal - Goal 7 ensuring environmental sustainability - expressly focused on environmental protection.

The development of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda

When it became clear that the Millennium Development Goals would not be achieved by the end of 2015, the United Nations began developing a new series of goals in advance of the MDG deadline. In the summer of 2012, the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons, consisting of persons from politics, science, civil society and the economy, was established to develop specific proposals. Members included the former German federal president Horst Köhler, the British prime minister David Cameron and the Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. The panel produced the report “A new global partnership – eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable Development”, which was published in 2013 and drew up specific recommendations for designing a new development agenda. It provided far-reaching and important ideas for the 2030 Agenda, which was adopted two years later. At the same time, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+20, decided to develop sustainability goals, too. It established the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG), a working group consisting of members coming from 70 countries, which was to come up with proposals for those sustainability goals. Germany shared a seat with France and Switzerland.

The two separate processes (developing follow-up goals of the MDGs and developing sustainability goals) were supported by civil society organisations and eventually combined. In 2014, the Open Working Group presented 17 goals established on the basis of the work of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons. These goals were then considered the follow-up goals of the MDGs and included the sustainability goals that resulted from the Rio process. They were discussed in intergovernmental negotiations that took place in the first half of 2015 and laid the basis for the 2030 Agenda, which was adopted at the UN General Assembly in September 2015.

Some areas have shown significant success since the Millennium Development Goals were adopted. The percentage of the poor, who live on less than USD 1.25 a day, for example, has been reduced from 47 per cent (base year 1990) to 14 per cent (2015). The goal of reducing poverty, which was restricted to halving (not eliminating) extreme poverty, was achieved ahead of the deadline, although this is primarily due to the economic development of India and China. In sub-Saharan Africa, however, poverty has increased. In total, only three of eight Millennium Development Goals have been achieved in all countries.

In particular, major deficiencies of implementation are still evident with regard to Goal 8 (on global partnership), which commits industrial countries to provide political, financial and technological support to the countries of the Global South (financial support being provided in particular by means of Official Development Assistance, ODA). Only a handful of countries comply with the obligation to invest 0.7 per cent of their gross national product in development cooperation. Achievement of Goal 7 (Environmental Sustainability) has remained far behind expectations: CO₂ emissions are still on the rise, while biodiversity continues to wane. If the development progress achieved is nullified by climate change, because small farmers lose their harvest due to increasingly extreme weather conditions and thus lack income opportunities, it becomes clear that fighting poverty without taking the earth’s limits into consideration is not sustainable. The new Sustainable Development Goals are going to better reflect these interconnections.

What is new about the SDGs?

The new 2030 Agenda is complex: 17 goals are divided into 169 subgoals. The first seven goals build on the former MDGs, extend them and seek to achieve what has not been achieved so far. They aim to eliminate absolute poverty worldwide, as well as hunger and various diseases, in addition to achieving gender justice. Considering the subgoals, however, it is clear they are still very vague. For example, Subgoal 1.1 demands fighting absolute income poverty. When it comes to fighting relative poverty “in all its dimensions,” however, the SDGs resemble the MDGs in that they seek to provide benefit for half the affected populations (Subgoal 1.2: “by 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions”). A goal seeking to completely overcome poverty on the basis of a multi-dimensional understanding of poverty, i.e. not only based on the amount of income but also on possibilities for political, social and cultural participation, is lacking. Progress has been made insofar as Goal 7 also takes the energy sector into account, which was absent in the MDGs. By 2030, everyone in the world is to have access to sustainable energy, which must be affordable, reliable and modern, but also efficient and largely won from renewable energies.

Goals 8 and 9 go beyond the MDGs and relate to the economy: the defined targets are at least 7 per cent economic growth in the least developed coun-



1. No poverty
2. Zero hunger
3. Good health and well-being
4. Quality education
5. Gender equality
6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Affordable and clean energy
8. Decent work and economic growth
9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure
10. Reduced inequalities
11. Sustainable cities and communities
12. Responsible consumption and production
13. Climate action
14. Life below water
15. Life on land
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions
17. Partnerships for the goals

Goal 2: “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”

The second sustainable development goal is very ambitious in its demands for “zero hunger” worldwide, while also taking malnutrition into account. Sustainable food production is to be ensured, including factors such as dramatic population growth and problems such as land grabbing or soil acidification. In view of its complex nature, the SDG 2 is one of the target catalogue’s greatest challenges.

It is already complicated to collect data for a detailed description of the goal and assessment of its achievement. For instance, it is difficult to assess the number of people suffering from hunger worldwide; the figures available are highly controversial. Moreover, decisive data are lacking. Agricultural land should, for example, also be catalogued with regard to its nutrient content and usability.

Food is also a multi-dimensional topic; it includes aspects such as health, gender justice, social exclusion, education, technology transfer and genetically modified organisms (GMOs), as well as patents on seeds, calling for activity on the part of almost all United Nations organisations, within their areas of responsibility. Political commitment at the global level is necessary if this goal is to be achieved. A sustainable agricultural scheme providing small farmers and their families with sufficient income and an increasing number of people with healthy food from natural farming must be the ultimate goal, since food insecurity generally results in political and humanitarian crises.

tries (LDCs), a “growth according to national circumstances” in other countries and investments in infrastructure (in particular in LDCs). The global problem of inequality within and between countries is reflected in Goal 10. That this controversial aspect has been taken into account is largely due to the successful political work of many civil society organisations. Goal 12 demands sustainable production and consumption patterns, waste prevention, and a sustainable public procurement.

Other goals deal with public goods and international aspects of globalisation. Goal 13 commits to combating climate change while Goals 14 and 15 are dedicated to the protection of oceans, seas, forests and ecosystems.

The countries discussed the controversial question of whether the new Sustainable Development Goals should also include the goal of peace, defining peaceful societies as a precondition for development and good governance goal. Goal 16 reflects these discussions, while Goal 17 relates above all to the means necessary for achieving these goals.

Consequences of the 2030 Agenda for development

Two basic principles of the 2030 Agenda stand out particularly in comparison with the MDGs: linking development and the environment, and the strong focus on the universal nature of the goals. The latter is the basis for the tasks to be achieved by all countries – industrialised and emerging countries as well as countries of the Global South. All countries thus have the status of developing countries. The states in the Global North – with their unsustainable production and consumption patterns – have the same domestic duties as less developed countries. They are no longer only sponsors and technology providers, as is the case with the MDGs.

The 2030 Agenda also establishes new links between development and environmental protection. However, this also creates conflicts that are not resolved in the target catalogue. In particular, developing and emerging countries have demanded adding economic growth (Goal 8). This goal, however, hardly addresses the fact that growth must not come at the expense of social justice and environmental protection; it must therefore occur within the earth’s limits. Unlimited growth leads to the deterioration of the environment and to social injustice. The natural limits of the planet require that the Northern countries significantly reduce their raw material consumption (efforts to decouple growth and resource consumption have thus far been unsuccessful) and make their consumption and production patterns sustainable (see Goal 12). This is the only strategy for achieving economic growth in the Global South that benefits all members equally. Technology transfers can, for instance, provide economic benefits to poor countries without involving non-sustainable technologies and practices. This request, made repeatedly by the G77, has now been incorporated in the 2030 Agenda. In creating wealth, there is no need to follow the non-sustainable development path of industrial countries. There are interesting alternatives to the guiding principle that economic growth must be the foundation of healthy economies. These are worth

reflecting upon seriously, even though they have not been incorporated in the 2030 Agenda.

Sustainable development is hindered, in many countries, by global finance and trade systems, as well as by wars and other social conflicts. An interest in generating short-term profit, such as through military exports, has taken precedence over the longer-term interests of communities. If the new Sustainable Development Goals are to be achieved, states need to take them into account in all foreign policy, trade and financial decisions, rather than undermining them by, for example, adoption of the TTIP agreement as it is currently being negotiated.

A tax on financial transactions could serve to fund the new agenda, which will require significantly higher funds than the MDGs, given the wide range of goals and stakeholders involved. Industrial countries must therefore finally implement the aid target of devoting 0.7 per cent of GNP to development cooperation; the amount may even have to be increased. Nevertheless, more money and financing instruments are needed. The focus is currently on engaging the private sector, given its natural interest in financing large, profitable infrastructure projects. It is of utmost importance that governments ensure private-sector involvement complies with (and even expands) human rights, social and labour law as well as environmental standards. Moreover, it should foster development so that indigenous communities, for example, are not forced off their land by large infrastructure projects. Strong political regulation is required to ensure that private investment benefits social development and complies with national development plans, which are often lacking entirely in developing countries.

As with the MDGs, the 2030 Agenda's fundamental problem is its voluntary nature. The agenda is not binding under international law, but civil society organisations can use it to strengthen their political demands and press their governments to implement the development goals. Civil society organisations worldwide must be in a position to act and work without repression. Unfortunately, in many countries this is not the case. Citizens must also be informed of the goals so as to be able to participate actively in their implementation. While the 2030 Agenda emphasises that the SDGs are to be realised according to the principle of "shared responsibilities," national and local policies will be indispensable to the agenda's success. This is also true for Germany.

How we can implement the goals in Germany

Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in Germany encompasses three aspects:

When adopting the Agenda, Germany first needs to consider how it will implement the goals domestically. Social goals, such as combating inequality or ensuring gender equality, are just as important in Germany as the goal of sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11) and the protection of oceans, seas and marine resources (Goal 14). This can be achieved as part of the national sustainability strategy, which has existed since 2002, will be reviewed in autumn 2016 and to which the SDGs will be added. It is important that Germany resists the temptation to prioritize interests and incorporates all 17 goals, ensuring a comprehensive control and reporting system that monitors the implementation of the ministries' tasks. It is to be feared, however, that the national sustainability strategy will prove insufficient, thus rendering it necessary to develop a national implementation plan to achieve the SDGs.

Germany must also support the realisation of SDGs aimed at protecting the global commons, such as climate and biodiversity. Germany needs to spearhead efforts and embrace its role of ambitious pioneer within international political processes. National projects such as successful energy, agricultural and mobility turnarounds are of key importance and can set an example for other governments and the European Union if successfully implemented.

By providing economic development cooperation, Germany can support other countries, which may otherwise be incapable of implementing the SDGs - a classic task of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

It is not always possible to distinguish specific areas, i.e. national goals, global goals and classical development cooperation, clearly. The dimensions of an individual goal are often reflected in several of these aspects.

If the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is to be successful and sustainable in the long term, Germany has to ensure consistency and coherence in political action, elevating sustainability to a principle. If the SDGs are implemented as part of the national sustainability strategy, as currently planned,

it will be necessary to ensure the responsible governmental and parliamentary bodies (the State Secretary Committee, the Parliamentary Advisory Council and the Council for Sustainable Development) are enhanced and adapted to the scope of the tasks. The Parliamentary Advisory Council, which currently only has formal examination rights, could, for example, be authorised to stop non-sustainable legislative initiatives. It is also necessary to ensure that civil society can participate in designing and monitoring the implementation strategy and process.

A new vision for sustainable development

The message of the new Sustainable Development Goals also applies to Germany: we cannot proceed on the current course. This relates both to international policies and to our consumer behaviour and lifestyle. We must not only fight the consequences of poverty but also its structural causes, such as the unfair design of global (financial) markets. This is why we need to implement the new Agenda in strict compliance with human rights and planetary limits, and ensure that no one is left behind. Global trade, financial and economic policies need to be fair and environmentally sustainable.

According to the principle of the Ecological Footprint, Germany consumed more than twice its fair share of resources in 2014. This problem cannot be solved with technical solutions for resource efficiency alone. Eco-sufficiency – that is, behavioural change to achieve a reduction in resource and energy consumption is essential but, unfortunately, lacking in the 2030 Agenda. In Germany, we are living far beyond our means, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda will depend on how much attention each of us pays to sustainability in the future. Strategies such as reducing energy consumption, minimising food waste and using public transport are well-known solutions to making daily life more sustainable. Amidst all the debate, we must not forget that a large-scale social and ecological transformation of the economy and society also requires awareness-raising initiatives and cultural change. The Sustainable Development Goals cannot be achieved through growth, technological progress and greater efficiency. Policies promoting eco-sufficiency and embracing an ethic of restraint (“enough is enough”) are vital steps that can be applied in wealthy states in particular. Such change should be initiated and promoted by political players.

By systematically embracing and expanding the SDGs, and in spite of their shortcomings (prioritizing economic growth as a solution to global issues, neglecting planetary limits and the idea of eco-sufficiency), a change towards a more sustainable world with less poverty and growing justice becomes possible.

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