

# STATEMENT



February 2017

## **More sustainability instead of “cherry picking”**

### **The G20 Action Plan for implementing the 2030 Agenda neglects the Agenda’s goals**

In view of the ongoing worldwide poverty and hunger crises, wars and armed conflicts, financial market instability and climate change, the industrialised and emerging countries that have joined together in the Group of 20 (G20) are also increasingly addressing the issue of sustainable development. At their summit meeting in Hangzhou, China, in September 2016, the G20 decided on an Action Plan for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations (UN). The German government has announced that during its G20 presidency, which lasts from December 1, 2016 to November 30, 2017, it will push for the implementation of the UN sustainability agenda together with the other G20 states and the European Union.

In the framework of the UN, all members of the G20 have committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda in its entirety. VENRO welcomes the G20 Action Plan as a first step towards a joint approach of the G20. If the Action Plan is to become an effective instrument of coordinating and strengthening the G20 measures for implementing the 2030 Agenda, it must be aligned with the Agenda in its basic tenets and make a coherent contribution to its holistic implementation. Therefore, it is to be welcomed that the G20 prefaces its Action Plan with principles and identifies areas of action in which it wants to make a particular joint contribution to achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda. Unfortunately, it does not take up all the core principles of the Agenda, and the selected principles are sometimes represented in a highly simplified way.

### **Ensuring universality, indivisibility and coherence**

The G20 stresses in its Action Plan that it wants to strengthen the coordination across its work areas and ensure policy coherence through a whole of government approach. Institutionally, this is to be ensured through the sherpas and through the Development Working Group (DWG). The Development Working Group is thus being upgraded to an important body of the G20 policy for sustainable development. In principle, all of this is welcome.

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However, the Action Plan itself illustrates how far the G20 has yet to go to arrive at a coherent policy. The individual work areas are largely unconnected. Its 15 areas of action only cover a fraction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They are not systematically oriented towards each other, nor towards the SDGs. The SDGs that are taken up in the Action Plan, such as those on the eradication of poverty and hunger, health or on peaceful and inclusive societies are represented in a simplified way. Nor have the severe impacts of the economic growth still being propagated by the G20 states on the ecological limits of our planet been taken into account.

Moreover, the declared positive intentions are countered by the fact that ultimately each new G20 presidency can set its own priorities for promoting the Action Plan. But a coherent policy can only be achieved in this way with extensive coordination efforts, which neither the sherpas nor the Development Working Group can make.

The Action Plan therefore reads rather like a hand-picked substitute agenda for the 2030 Agenda that contradicts the latter's principles of universality, indivisibility and coherence, is not expedient and might even result in a weakening or underfunding of the Agenda. Setting priorities must not counteract the comprehensive implementation of the remaining SDGs. This also means that all G20 states must continue to ensure the coherent implementation of all SDGs in their respective national actions.

VENRO calls upon the German government to push, in the framework of its G20 presidency, for

- the core principles, goals and measures in the Action Plan to be brought into agreement with those of the 2030 Agenda and for central concepts of the 2030 Agenda to be used within its meaning, i.e. to be neither reinterpreted nor relativised, dismissed or changed.
- the principle of indivisibility of the 2030 Agenda to be acknowledged and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and all its goals to be promoted. The Action Plan should be developed further so that it equally applies to all presidencies and that the equal implementation of all goals of the 2030 Agenda is ensured.
- the G20 member states to realise a socio-ecologically sustainable economic model in which there are binding transparency requirements for business and in which human rights, social and ecological standards are adhered to in production and supply chains.

## Leaving no one behind and realising the global partnership

The G20 member states declared that they want to jointly take action against the worldwide social inequality by implementing the 2030 Agenda. According to the 2030 Agenda, all SDGs are to be realised for all people and population groups, and those that are most marginalised and disadvantaged are to be reached first. For instance, it is striking that among the principles of the Action Plan the meaning of the basic maxim “leave no one behind” is only touched upon, while concrete aspects of “being left behind” are not taken up in the areas of action and no measures for more social justice are presented. This applies e.g. to gender equality and the equal participation of women. The tendencies to relativise the core principle “leave no one behind” are particularly worrying; this also relativises the clear orientation towards holistic human development.

The 2030 Agenda should be achieved for all people through a revitalised global partnership based on solidarity, particularly with the poorest and with people in vulnerable situations and in the least developed countries. The global partnership must not be reduced to the flexible, mutually beneficial win-win relationships that the G20 mentions in its Action Plan. Ensuring that no one is left behind requires sufficient financial resources. It is therefore to be welcomed that the principles of the Action Plan refer to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for sustainable development.

But how exactly the G20 will raise the necessary financial resources for achieving sustainable development with its “comparative advantage” (p. 1) as a “global economic forum” (p. 1) has yet to be elaborated in the Action Plan. Referring to “evidence-based practices” (p. 7) for increasing financial inclusion, for mobilising domestic resources and for climate finance unfortunately does not go beyond existing approaches.

VENRO expects the German government to push for

- every G20 contribution towards implementing the SDGs to be oriented towards human rights standards and to provide increased benefits first and foremost to those people and population groups that have been most marginalised and disadvantaged so far and to lead to more gender equality and participation of women.
- the industrialised countries of the G20 to comply with their international commitment of providing at least 0.7 percent of the gross national income for official development assistance and a further 0.15 to 0.2 percent of the gross national income for the least developed

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countries. The German government should set an example and explain how the 0.7 percent target and the target with respect to the least developed countries can be achieved by 2020.

## Ensuring participation and accountability

The 2030 Agenda was developed in a participatory manner. This is one of the reasons for its comprehensive, integrated and transformative orientation. Participation is also regarded as a guarantee for success in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. All means required for implementing the Agenda should be mobilised with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people. Societal groups can accompany the implementation efforts of the governments in a critical and constructive way through comprehensive participation. This can contribute to more acceptance and legitimacy of the 2030 Agenda and of the measures pursued by the governments. However, participation as a cornerstone of successful implementation is completely neglected in the Action Plan. This is particularly problematic against the background that the scope for action and the participation of civil society are being curtailed worldwide, in particular also in some G20 countries such as China, Saudi Arabia or Russia.

The participation of societal groups can also contribute to good accountability. The G20 neglects this aspect in its Action Plan, which merely states that the Development Working Group is to assume an important role in reviewing the G20 measures for achieving the 2030 Agenda. Making the procedures stated in the 2030 Agenda more binding and stronger in the framework of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) of the UN would be much more important than establishing a further intergovernmental review procedure. This would mean urging the G20 member states to promptly formulate solid national and regional action plans, to systematically implement them and to report on the implementation at the HLPF.

VENRO expects the German government to push for all G20 countries to

- acknowledge the significance and need of civil society participation in policy-making and accountability and ensure a comprehensive, inclusive and transparent participation of civil society actors that is relevant for decisions in implementing the 2030 Agenda.
- promptly present solid national action plans for implementing the 2030 Agenda, substantiate them with adequate time frames and consistently implement them.
- be instrumental in the substantial and financial support of the HLPF process of implementation review and strengthen its binding character.

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