



Statement by SDG Watch Europe on the European Commission's "Communication on the next steps for a sustainable European future - European action for sustainability"

Summary

SDG Watch Europe, a civil society alliance of more than 90 EU CSOs, is expressing its disappointment following today's publication of the European Commission's "Communication on the next steps for a sustainable European future - European action for sustainability". The Communication provides little new information about how the EU intends to make Agenda 2030 a reality in Europe or around the world. **It is a justification of business-as-usual**, which will not deliver on the ambitious commitments of the new global agenda.

The Communication states that the EU's answer to the 2030 Agenda will include two different work streams. The first work stream will involve fully integrating the SDGs in the European policy framework and current Commission priorities, assessing where the EU stands and identifying the most relevant sustainability concerns. The Communication mentions that the second track will launch "reflection work on further developing the EU's longer-term vision and the focus of sectoral policies after 2020", and preparing for the "long term implementation" of the SDGs. It also mentions that the new Multiannual Financial Framework beyond 2020 will reorient the EU budget's contributions towards the achievement of the EU's long-term objectives."

SDG Watch Europe regrets that a clearer road-map of the EU's plans for SDG implementation could not have been provided by the Commission at this stage, over one year after the adoption of Agenda 2030. It would appear that "Business as Usual" at EU level based on the Juncker 10 Priorities will apply until 2020, when only ten of the fifteen year SDG implementation timeframe will remain. The Commission's stated intention to engage

in a second strand of work reflecting on the long-term implementation of the SDGs is vague and unsatisfactory, and provides no information on whether and how civil society and other stakeholders will be included in this important work.

Vision and Values

Agenda 2030 is a globally-agreed vision for a better, fairer, more equal world. It amounts to more than just a set of goals and targets. It offers the EU a new framework to begin a **critically important shift away from the current unsustainable economic development model**. The failures of today's policies to tackle poverty, and their direct contribution to rising inequality, the destruction of the environment, the concentration of wealth and political power in fewer and fewer hands, and the disaffection of many people across Europe with the European Union, its institutions and policies, are now being acknowledged by many.

It will be impossible to implement the Agenda 2030 vision without moving away from the current dominant focus on economic growth and military security to a new sustainable development paradigm which prioritises human and planetary well-being, and encourages economic progress within planetary boundaries. Agenda 2030 provides an alternative framework to the security and anti-migration perspectives that increasingly dominate political discourse and policy development in Europe and elsewhere. Unfortunately in many policy areas, and particularly where migration is concerned, EU policies are actively undermining the stated values of peace and freedom, mutual respect and shared responsibility, justice and solidarity, equity, gender equality and human rights and dignity, democracy, rule of law and a healthy environment for all, that are set out in the EU Treaties.

The Communication says little about how the European Union will live up to its pledge to play a leading role in the realisation of Agenda 2030 and to promoting an economic model in which people, social justice, environmental and health protection, democracy, transparency and corporate accountability take centre stage. Furthermore, judging from the content of the Communication, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is clearly not seen as an important new narrative for the EU, providing a longer-term vision for Europe at

a time when this is sorely lacking. Instead, the substance of this Communication suggests that the EU intends to take its direction from the limited set of Juncker priorities. SDG Watch Europe notes that President Juncker's "State of the Union" address this year made no reference to the Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore the EU Commission's Work Plan for 2017 contains few references to the SDGs.

Implementation measures

The Communication says nothing about the need to develop an overarching EU Sustainable Development Strategy with a timeline of 2030 and incorporating EU internal and external action, although SDG Watch Europe has highlighted the need for the development of such a strategy over the past 15 month period. It also lacks any new or concrete details about whether an EU- wide SDG implementation plan with specific targets and deadlines will be developed, or how effective co-ordination between the EU and Member States will be achieved. The Communication says little about how new SDG multi-stakeholder mechanisms and processes involving civil society, the private sector, trade unions, academia and other sectors will be properly operationalised by the EU.

Addressing conflicts

If the growing number of environmental and social conflicts around the world are not addressed, SDG 1 which aims to end extreme poverty, especially in fragile contexts, is unlikely to be met. The SDG 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies was a landmark recognition of the important connection between development and peace. Yet, the Commission Communication makes no specific reference as to how the peace-related targets across the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs will be implemented in a coherent manner so as to achieve sustainable peace. The EU needs to harness action on all 17 goals and 169 targets as a means for addressing the root causes of conflict, and needs to place the 'leave no one behind' commitment at the heart of its implementation strategy.

Promoting the effective participation of civil society

The lack of consultation with European civil society in the preparation of this Communication was unacceptable. Agenda 2030 includes commitments to open, participatory, and inclusive multi-stakeholder approaches. In light of these commitments, the members of SDG Watch Europe expected to be consulted by the Commission in the important exercise of "mapping" existing EU policy frameworks, and identifying the gaps in relation to SDG commitments. However, the process was vague and secretive and civil society was truly kept "at arm's length". We are very disappointed at having been excluded in this way. We wish to take this opportunity to repeat our call for non-profit civil society organisations to receive adequate information in sufficient time and to be included as an active partner in the entire Agenda 2030 process from planning to implementation, monitoring and review.

Active civil society participation in the planning, implementation and follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda is essential. In order to facilitate this kind of participation, transparent inclusive multi-stakeholder governance structures are required. These new inclusive governance structures should include all stakeholder groups, and facilitate the full involvement of these groups in all aspects of the structure's functioning, including management and decision-making. SDG Watch Europe insists that the self-organising principle must apply in relation to any new SDG-related multi-stakeholder forums, where the stakeholder groups should decide who their representatives will be. Where the involvement of private sector actors in such forums are concerned, we would like to see full representation ensured to progressive businesses and cooperatives.

Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development

Agenda 2030 places a particular emphasis on universality and on recognising the important inter-linkages between policy areas. Unfortunately the Communication provides little new or additional information on what the Commission intends to do in this regard. SDG Watch Europe's members have urged the Commission to recommit to Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) as the EU Treaty obligation ensuring all EU policies do not contradict EU development objectives such as poverty eradication, with the objective of extending this legal commitment to also include SDG 17.14 on Policy Coherence for Sustainable

Development (PCSD). We have called on the Commission to act on the recommendation by the European Parliament in its 12 May resolution, for PCD to be integrated into the 2030 Agenda implementation, aiming to overcome the 'silo' or unintegrated approach to policy development and implementation.

SDG Watch Europe urges the Commission to fully incorporate and operationalise a new PCSD process as part of its overall implementation of Agenda 2030. First of all, an overarching Sustainable Development Strategy should be formulated and endorsed at the highest political level, and its implementation should be supported throughout the European institutions. This could include, for example, the full integration of the Sustainable Development Agenda in the implementation of the Structural Reform Support Service, a sustainability network within the Commission, and the further development of the EU's impact assessment system and other tools used for vetting existing and new EU directives and strategies.

Impact assessments should systematically look at the impacts of EU policies on people living in poverty in developing countries, local communities and indigenous peoples. Impact assessments should also examine the impact of EU policies on the environment and natural resources, should involve participatory processes, provide safeguards against dominance by private interest groups, and be taken into account in subsequent policy proposals. As called for by the European Parliament, redress mechanisms should be established to allow for cases of detrimental impacts by EU policies on sustainable development and environmental objectives to be dealt with, thereby making PCSD a reality.

The private sector

The role of the private sector in implementing Agenda 2030 is strongly promoted in the Commission's Communication. SDG Watch Europe welcomes the Commission's commitment to "intensify its work on Responsible Business Conduct, focusing on concrete actions to meet current and future social environmental and governance challenges, building upon the main principles and policy approach identified in the Commission's EU Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy". However our members believe that this does not go far enough as a CSR approach is entirely voluntary where the private sector is concerned.

We believe the Communication overlooks a number of critically important issues linked to the role of the private sector in making the transition to a fairer and more sustainable world. Firstly, the need for the private sector to comply with established development effectiveness principles when implementing Agenda 2030 is not properly addressed. Little is said in the Communication about the need for greater levels of accountability and transparency where the private sector, and particularly multi-national corporations, are concerned. The Communication does not address the issue of whether the EU Commission will support the development of an international, binding, corporate accountability framework to ensure that private sector partners adhere to certain environmental and human rights standards.

The Communication also does not recognise or make important distinctions between the scale and impact of different private sector actors. It fails to acknowledge the impact on inclusive and sustainable development of large and powerful European corporations whose global ecological and social negative impacts are significant and, on the other hand, of smaller businesses, producers' networks, social enterprises and co-operatives, which operate often more in a sustainable way.

The Communication also fails to mention the contribution that the private sector must make to the transition towards sustainable consumption and production patterns in Europe and globally, taking into account both environmental and social considerations. It fails to prioritise environmentally-friendly and people-centred business models such as cooperatives. These organisations build on sustainable production patterns, create decent work opportunities and keep more value with workers and producers, thereby making the transition towards a more robust, inclusive and poverty-reducing economic activity in developing countries. SDG Watch Europe believes that the EU should support business models that commit to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, such as Fair Trade, with a particular emphasis on decent work, sustainable economic development, gender equality environmental protection, and human rights.

Conclusion

SDG Watch Europe believes that **it will be impossible to implement the vision of Agenda 2030 without changing current EU and Member State policies and paradigms to become more coherent with the Sustainable Development Goals.** There is little, if anything, in the substance of the EC Communication just published which suggests that the European Commission understands this reality or is prepared to take the necessary steps to realise the transformative vision of Agenda 2030, within the EU or in its external action.



SDG Watch Europe is a EU level, cross-sectoral, non profit civil society alliance of over 90 NGOs, from development, environment, social, human rights and other sectors. Our goal is to hold governments to account and ensure the full implementation of Agenda 2030 by the EU and its Member States

SDG WATCH EUROPE MEMBER ORGANISATIONS:

11.11.11

Act Alliance

ActionAid

AICEM Italy

ALDA-European Association for Local Democracy

Alianza por la Solidaridad

Beyond 2015

Brot Fuer Die Welt

Caritas Europa

CARE

CBM

CEEweb for Biodiversity

CEV European Volunteer Center
Child Fund
Child Helpline International
Child Pact
CIDSE
CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation
Civil Society Europe
Climate Action Network Europe
Compassion in World Farming
CONCORD Europe
CONCORD Sweden
Conservation International Europe
Confederation of Family Organisations in the EU (COFACE)
Cooperatives Europe
Coordinadora
Coordination SUD
Culture Action Europe
Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevoelkerung
DOCHAS
Ecocity
Education International
ENAR
ESN
EU-CORD
Eurochild
Eurodiacona
EuroNGOs
European Anti-Poverty Network
European Association for the Education of Adults
European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning
European Environmental Bureau
European Network of National Civil Society Associations
European Peacebuilding Liaison Office
European Public Health Alliance

European Trade Union Confederation
European Volunteer Centre
European Women's Lobby
European Youth Forum
Fair Trade Advocacy Office
Fair Trials
Fern
FIDH International Federation for Human Rights
Friends of the Earth Europe
GAIA Education
Global Call to Action Against Poverty
Global Forum on Migration and Development
Habitat
Handicap International
Hellenic Platform for Development
Help Age
Housing Europe
IBON International
International Catholic Migration Commission
International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements EU Group
International Institute for Sustainable Development
International Trade Union Confederation
IPPF European Network
Kehys/Finnish platform
Lifelong Learning Platform
Light for the World
Lithuanian NGDO Platform
LADDER
MADE Network
Open Knowledge Foundation Germany
Plan International
Save the Children
Search for Common Ground
SKOP

Social Platform

SoleTerre

SOLIDAR

SOS Children's Villages International

Terre des Hommes

The Danish 92 Group

Transparency International

VSO International

Women in Europe for a Common Future

World Vision

WWF EU