

EL SALVADOR

Commitment to walk in solidarity towards the SDGs

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El Salvador was one of 60 countries selected by the United Nations Development System (UNDS) to implement the consultation phase of the Post 2015 Development Agenda. This allowed civil society organizations to generate a space for dialogue that led to the inclusion of priority issues for the country's development in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Subsequently El Salvador became one of fifteen countries selected for accelerated implementation of the SDGs, taking into account that goals and objectives such as safety, equity, health, quality education, growth, resilience and transparency had already been defined in the Five-Year Development Plan, as well as the progress made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Among measures agreed between the UNDS and the Salvadoran Government is the creation of a National Council for Sustainable Development, composed of representatives from the Government, UNDS, civil society and the private sector.

Despite progress towards achieving the MDGs, El Salvador still lags on a number of important goals, particularly with regard to poverty reduction, gender equality and the environmental protection, either for lack of resources or lack of commitment. With the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the government has a new opportunity to establish guidelines for all sectors of the country to commit to implementation.

SDG Dialogues: from openness to consultation

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Post 2015 country-wide consultations led to the creation of five working groups: marginalized populations, organized groups, academics and opinion leaders, private sector and trade unions, and the public sector.

Many civil society organizations participated in the working group on marginalized populations, identified as a priority because of social, economic, and/or political exclusion: territories and communities, indigenous people, women, people with physical challenges, and youth.

The dialogue on the territories resulted in the incorporation of a number of issues that require priority attention from the state and the entities called upon to take action, mainly those issues identified by groups who see their rights violated. Among these are: the right to work, to decent housing, food, sustainable agriculture, quality education and health care, to gender equality, citizen security and violence prevention, including domestic violence, to environmental protection and climate change mitigation, taking into account the impact that climate change has on food security and sustainable livelihoods.

* Members of organizations that make up Social Watch El Salvador. Special thanks to César Villalona for his contribution in the analysis of progress in poverty reduction and fiscal justice.

In addition, the consultations prioritized issues of public transport, respect for the lives of people, and the problem of family disintegration owing to the migration of thousands of Salvadorans who are forced to leave the country as a consequence of poverty or insecurity.

Drawing on these themes, the country vision document identifies three challenges: to place *people at the center of public policies*, with both voice and vote in the issues that will impact their life; to build a country with *equal opportunities and access to quality public services* also guaranteeing human rights for all people; and to reconcile differences among the armed gangs that prey upon communities. All of these challenges result from the class polarization that solidified over years of armed conflict and frustrate efforts to create dialogue and tolerance in order to give priority to the common good.

From these visions of the sectors and territories the common view is summarized, which is reflected in the country paper "El Salvador-Post 2015 Development Agenda - The country we want": *fair, inclusive, free from discrimination and violence, with equal opportunities and rights for all men and women, with educated and happy children.*²

Challenges to achieving the SDGs: the civil society perspective

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The agreement between the Salvadoran Government and UNDS that led to the creation of a National Council for Sustainable Development, also includes a mandate to follow-up and monitor actions to achieve the 17 SDGs. Over the next four years the actions to be implemented will be articulated in a roadmap defined by the Government, in accordance with the objectives and strategies of the Five-Year Development Plan.

This makes the role of civil society paramount in terms of monitoring compliance with the SDGs, taking into account that in El Salvador there are presidential elections every five years, which imply changes in vision, policies and national development programmes.

One of the first challenges for effective implementation of actions to meet the SDGs is to secure ongoing State funding, which requires a fair tax reform that makes it possible to implement needed social programmes and actions to achieve the SDGs.

Over the last three years, civil society organizations, including Social Watch El Salvador have promoted the need for tax justice through proposals to curtail tax evasion, which in 2013 was 28 percent (about USD 1.5 billion), the review of 26 laws that allow large companies not to pay taxes and cost the State USD 1.2 billion per year, or up to 40 percent of the tax on companies earning more than USD 1 million a year, and the requirement for the Attorney General's Office to investigate 152 cases of corruption occurred in administrations previous to 2009.

Respect for human rights means that everyone should meet their needs for food, health, education, housing, services and equal access to justice. Actions taken by the last two governments are good, but not enough to cover the country's historical social divisions.

A second major challenge is the country's high environmental vulnerability. According to the UN 2015 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction, since 2001 the annual historical average of losses due to extreme weather events is "equivalent to almost 60 percent of the annual average of its public

² UN Country Paper, El Salvador Post 2015 Development Agenda, "The Country We Want", p. 47; available at http://www.sv.undp.org/content/el_salvador/es/home/library/mdg/undp_sv_tercerinformeodm/

investment".³ This makes it urgent to invest in the kind of development that protects further degradation and strengthens ecosystems to reduce environmental vulnerabilities that mostly affect the poorest sectors of the population.

El Salvador has joined global efforts to reduce the impact of climate change: in 1995 it ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol in 1998. It has also developed a National Environmental Policy and a National Strategy on Climate Change which include mechanisms to address loss and damage, adaptation, critical investments to reduce losses and risk transfers, and so on. At the base of these strategy and policy documents are five critical issues: awareness; education and training; research; technology; and financing. They also identify inter-agency coordination, institutional strengthening, local governance and management models, monitoring, reporting and verification.⁴

However, historically there has been a gap in the implementation of laws and agreements that would guarantee the protection of the environment and vulnerable areas. And only when disaster strikes are the laws applied, and then in a punitive and not a preventive way. The country needs to invest in awareness and education about the unsustainability of life on the planet if we continue with the current lifestyle and overconsumption. This makes it urgent to secure financing for actions to counteract the negative effects of climate change.

Given these major challenges that we, as organized civil society and non-governmental organizations have set out, it is necessary to give priority to three main lines of action to ensure compliance with the SDGs: to generate greater public awareness and knowledge about the SDGs; to increase state revenue through a fair tax reform where those who have more pay more and to combat tax evasion and avoidance effectively; and to undertake institutional reforms that are monitored and reviewed by an organized and empowered civil society.

Only if people are empowered and organized, with full knowledge of their rights, with the sole aim of achieving the common good with solidarity and equality, will they be able to guide and monitor the implementation of the actions required to achieve the nationally identified SDGs. Although actions are executed by different parts of government, the people are the guarantor of all previous participatory processes (dialogue with action and Post 2015 Consultation) to progress towards the results expected and generate the changes that the MDGs failed to achieve for lack of political will and effective citizen participation.

In El Salvador, the communities organized in the territories must fight for the defense of their economic, social, cultural and environmental rights in order to ensure not only the fulfillment of the goals of the SDGs but also a dignified life in full enjoyment of rights for Salvadorans.

³ UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction (GAR) 2015, p. 107..

http://www.sv.undp.org/content/eL_salvador/es/home/library/mdg/consultas-para-la-localizacion-de-la-agenda-post-2015.html

⁴ <http://www.marn.gob.sv/destacado/cp/camgio-climatico/>, accessed 1 May 2016.