

CYPRUS

Fit to Deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

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The Cypriot government strongly supported the process of developing the post-2015 sustainable development agenda and has repeatedly expressed its commitment to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, it has yet to adopt a comprehensive policy framework for implementation of the goals in the national context. This report discusses the progress made towards a national strategic framework for the implementation of the SDGs and identifies the steps taken, the challenges and opportunities as well as the issue of budgeting. It goes on to highlight the ways that SDGs could act as catalyst during the implementation of a solution to the Cyprus problem, and concludes with a few recommendations.

National Strategic Framework

Cyprus supported the process leading to the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and demonstrated a commitment to work towards the implementation of the SDGs, both at the national and international levels. During the United Nations Summit that saw the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades underscored the importance of delivering a better, more prosperous and peaceful world which will be sustainable, equitable and just. He further stated that “Cyprus is committed both nationally and as EU member to implementing the goals and targets of our agenda [the 2030 Agenda] at home and abroad”.¹

However, almost two years after the adoption of the SDGs, Cyprus has yet to set its national priorities and targets and to design a national comprehensive strategy for their implementation.

Current policies guiding sustainable development

Cypriot legislation, strategies and policies on sustainable and inclusive development have been interlinked with the country’s membership of the European Union. As noted, there is no formal governmental strategy on the 2030 Agenda; however, there are ongoing initiatives that promote sustainable development at both the national and international levels. The Ministry of Education and Culture has a Global Education Unit,² through which it promotes the SDGs in the formal education system, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has already implemented a series of activities such as workshops, exhibitions and other awareness raising initiatives about the SDGs. Cyprus has also developed a National Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change in order to implement the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.³

Furthermore, policies on sustainable development at the national level are currently guided by “Europe 2020”, the European Union’s growth strategy for the ten year period 2010 - 2020, with the aim of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

1 Address by H.E. Mr. Nicos Anastasiades, President of the Republic of Cyprus at the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, 26 September 2015.
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20508cyprus.pdf> Accessed online 5 June 2017.

2 http://www.moec.gov.cy/pagkosmia_ekpaidefsi/index.html

3 Ministry of Agriculture, National Strategy for Adjustment to Climate Change, 2017 (in Greek)

Implementation of Europe 2020 is done through annual National Reform Programmes based on agreed national targets and growth policies.

The extent to which Cyprus has achieved its targets under Europe 2020 varies. In some areas it has seen significant progress towards its 2020 targets, such as in education and energy consumption, while in other areas such as employment, greenhouse gas emissions and poverty reduction there are still significant challenges. In 2015, youth unemployment in Cyprus was 32.8 percent, much higher than the European average of 20.4 percent.⁴ Furthermore, between 2011 and 2015 the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Cyprus more than doubled, while the average across Europe was decreasing during the same period.⁵

A National Strategy for the SDGs

Cyprus could continue to focus its own sustainable development strategy on the targets it set under Europe 2020. However, given that the SDGs are broader both in scope and duration, it will still need to set more long-term priorities and a multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral, comprehensive and integrated strategy for sustainable development by 2030. Cyprus will particularly need to take into consideration the goals in the 2030 Agenda that are not addressed under Europe 2020. Most importantly, the national strategy will need to integrate and ensure balance between all three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – and should lead to policy coherence for sustainable development on the island.⁶

As Cyprus is a member of the European Union, the Cypriot strategy will be guided by the next steps taken from the EU for a sustainable future and the implementation of the SDGs. The European Commission published a Communication to that effect in November 2016, although its exact policies and implementation strategies have not yet been defined.⁷ The new Cypriot strategy to achieve sustainable development by 2030 could – and should – form the foundation for Cyprus' economic, environmental and human development over the next 15 years, guiding the island state into a sustainable future.

To date, a comprehensive national strategy for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda has not yet been developed, notwithstanding the statements by high-ranking officials on the government's commitment to the SDGs. However, the process for developing a strategic policy framework has commenced. This process encompasses the establishment of an inter-ministerial committee to examine and evaluate the SDGs and their applicability in Cyprus, including possible interlinkages with existing initiatives and the identification of national priorities.⁸ While initially the focal point was the Environmental service from the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment, we have seen a significant role being played by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Culture. In the 2016 Social Watch Report on Cyprus it was pointed out that the SDGs would be much better served by an inter-ministerial and intra-departmental entity, preferably the Directorate General for European Programmes,

4 Statistical Service of Cyprus, "Cyprus in the EU Scale", Republic of Cyprus, 2016.

5 Statistical Service of Cyprus, "The European Union Towards 2020", 9 May 2017, available at: [http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/19D61CBA26661E93C225811B00308976/\\$file/EU_2020-EN-090517.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/19D61CBA26661E93C225811B00308976/$file/EU_2020-EN-090517.pdf?OpenElement) accessed on 8 June 2017.

6 For more analysis on policy coherence for sustainable development see ECDPM Discussion Paper "Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the European Union: Constructing an EU approach to Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development", July 2016, available at:

ecdpm.org/publications/implementation-2030-agenda-european-union, accessed online on 7 June 2017.

7 European Commission, COM (2016) 739 final.

8 Permanent Mission of the Republic of Cyprus, Geneva. "Planning, Implementation, Follow-up and Review of the Sustainable Development Goals. Regional Survey by UNECE and the Regional UN Development Group for Europe and Central Asia" Ref.254/81/6, 15 February 2016, available at: https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/sustainable-development/Cyprus_Regional_SDG_Survey.pdf, accessed online 7 June 2017.

Coordination and Development (DG – EPCD).⁹ By allocating the coordination role to the DG-EPCD, Cyprus would be able to draw more synergies between the SDGs and Europe 2020 and avoid duplication of efforts.

In May 2017, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Culture jointly launched an online survey to explore Cypriot public opinion as to the national priorities for sustainable development and examine the degree to which people consider that Cyprus is making progress in terms of welfare and development. Furthermore, the online survey states that its results will be taken into account for Cyprus' voluntary report to the High Level Political Forum in July 2017. This is a welcome development, showing that the government is working towards the development of a strategy, while also taking into consideration public opinion. However, we acknowledge that this survey comes with a year and a half delay, after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. Cyprus needs to become more proactive in designing its own strategy and begin its implementation.

Challenges and Opportunities

Delays in developing a national strategy raise additional challenges. In May 2017 the Council of Ministers adopted the National Strategy for Youth. This was drafted by the Youth Board of Cyprus, following a participatory process with island-wide and online youth consultations between May 2015 and November 2016. Despite the fact that the Strategy for Youth was developed and finalized after the adoption of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, it makes no reference to the 2030 Agenda nor to the Sustainable Development Goals. The Youth Strategy will guide the Cypriot actions on youth between 2017 and 2022. This was a missed opportunity to bring the global commitments to the Cypriot youth and empower them to incorporate the SDGs in the design of their own youth strategy and priorities.

Nonetheless, the Strategy for Youth has a lot of correlations with the SDGs, with priorities on employment and entrepreneurship, social integration, education, health and wellbeing, volunteerism, youth and the world, and sustainable development, amongst others. The Cypriot youth are already asking for sustainable economic, social and environmental development and they are set to work towards achieving that. The government should support them and collaborate with youth as one of the forces that will lead to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Future We Want! This is just an example of the importance of creating a multi-stakeholder inclusive National Strategy on Sustainable Development as soon as possible.

It is also essential that Cyprus takes into consideration existing challenges that may hinder progress towards achieving its development priorities. It should seek to address such challenges, either within the Sustainable Development policy framework or with other policies. An example is the quality of the actuarial studies and impact assessments and the importance of ensuring quality and public dialogue. For instance, while environmental impact assessments take place before the development of major infrastructure projects in accordance with Cypriot legislation, citizens and experts often raise concerns as to the independence and accuracy of these assessments.¹⁰ In another example, a citizens' initiative was created to monitor the management of the Social Insurance Fund, ensure its viability and propose ways to ensure sound and transparent management of the Fund. The initiative also questioned the reliability of the actuarial study for the viability of the Fund.¹¹

⁹ 2016 Social Watch Report-Cyprus, p. 239.
<http://www.socialwatch.org/node/17276>

¹⁰ Audit Office of the Republic, "Management of Cypriot shores", 2014, available at:

[http://www.audit.gov.cy/audit/audit.nsf/All/A37E8C95CA86DB10C2257D51002030D0/\\$file/Διαχείριση%20παραλιών%20της%20Κύπρου.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.audit.gov.cy/audit/audit.nsf/All/A37E8C95CA86DB10C2257D51002030D0/$file/Διαχείριση%20παραλιών%20της%20Κύπρου.pdf?OpenElement) Also see <http://www.foeeurope.org/cyprus-likely-face-court-threatened-turtles-290816>

¹¹ Cyprus Mail, "People shouldn't worry about pensions says labour minister", 23 May 2017, available at: <http://cyprus->

Furthermore, a systemic challenge that impacts on Cyprus' development efforts is corruption. A recent Transparency International (TI) Report found that the level of corruption in 2016 increased in comparison with the previous years, causing Cyprus to fall by 15 positions, to number 47 in the TI's Corruption Perceptions Index 2016.¹² Similarly, a Eurostat Report ranks Cyprus fifth from last across the EU in terms of trust in institutions, an indication of a state's good governance.¹³

The last year also saw some developments that could positively contribute to the SDGs. The Parliament adopted the law on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR),¹⁴ while corporations have formed CSR Cyprus, an organization that seeks to promote the concepts of CSR and sustainability to Cypriot businesses and organizations. This is a newly emerging concept in the Cypriot business world. CSR promotes a constant dialogue with all stakeholders in order to ensure transparency, trust and promote similar principles related to sustainability.¹⁵ As Cyprus moves to more sustainable development and more Cypriot companies adopt CSR, Cyprus should explore how to better engage them in achieving its development priorities.

The Role of Civil Society

The nature of Cypriot civil society, and especially Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), has developed mainly over the last 20 years.¹⁶ During this period, several NGOs were created that worked on bi-communal cooperation between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, social welfare, justice, equality, socio-economic development and environmental protection. At the same time, there have been NGO initiatives on development cooperation, especially through the promotion of the Millennium Development Goals and Global Education in Cyprus. This development work was often done with financial support from the European Union and in collaboration with governmental departments, such as the Global Education Unit of the Ministry of Education and CyprusAid, the development Cooperation Service of Cyprus. It led to a wide range of awareness raising activities which are still continuing. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, Cypriot civil society can build on its achievements and significantly contribute to the country's sustainable development work. It can do so in the following ways:

Ensuring proper and inclusive planning, through public consultations for the creation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development. Civil society has a particular role to play in enabling citizens to engage the process, as well as to ensure that the government listens to the citizens' voice. The role of the Youth in this is quite crucial. Worldwide the youth have been identified as a key stakeholder that needs to be included in all the planning and implementation processes. In Cyprus there are several initiatives to promote youth participation. Through education and more opportunities availed to them, youth can take a leading role in achieving the SDGs, as today's and tomorrow's activists, journalists, entrepreneurs, business people, artists, and politicians.

mail.com/2017/05/23/people-shouldnt-worry-pensions-says-labour-minister/

¹² Transparency Cyprus, Results of Corruption Perceptions Index 2016, available at: <http://transparencycyprus.org/archives/4890> accessed 9 June 2017.

¹³ The relevant data were collected in 2013. See Eurostat, "Sustainable Development in The European Union, Statistical Glance from the Viewpoint of the UN Sustainable Development Goals", 2016 Edition, available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/7745644/KS-02-16-996-EN-N.pdf>

¹⁴ Cyprus Gazette no .4603, 2 June 2017, p. 415, available at: [http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/gpo/gpo.nsf/All/320B28F66161A6BBC225813300289029/\\$file/4603%202%206%202017%20PARARTHMA%201o%20MEROS%201.pdf](http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/gpo/gpo.nsf/All/320B28F66161A6BBC225813300289029/$file/4603%202%206%202017%20PARARTHMA%201o%20MEROS%201.pdf)

¹⁵ <http://www.csreurope.org/csr-cyprus>. See also <http://www.inbusinessnews.com/inbusiness/news/business/services/csr-cyprus-gegonos-apotelei-to-somateio-eke-sthn-kypro> accessed 9 June 2017 (in Greek)

¹⁶ Cypriot Civil Society Mapping and Capacity Building Project, Capacity Assessment Report of Civil Society Organisations in Cyprus, 2015.

Monitoring of implementation and holding government accountable to its commitments is perhaps the most important role of civil society. In order to fulfill this role civil society should follow-up on policy and legislative work, collect and analyse disaggregated data, engage in public discourse and inform citizens about government actions at all levels. Media, NGOs and the scientific community should collaborate more closely to ensure transparency, accountability and rigorous monitoring of the implementation of this strategy as well as of the overall policies, legislative measures and strategies of the government. Such collaboration will enable these groups to share better information with the public, raise concerns over government policies and private practices that contravene the SDGs and hold state and private corporations accountable for their actions. However, monitoring will also lead to highlighting and supporting the good public and private initiatives.

Advocating for and facilitating the implementation of projects and activities that will contribute to Cyprus' development priorities. In order for NGOs to be able to effectively work in these areas, the NGO legislation which is still pending before the Parliament needs to be urgently adopted.

The Budgeting Issue

The Cyprus 2016 Social Watch Report recommended that a dedicated recurring budget line be allocated to implementing the goals of the 2030 Agenda. Even before the national strategy is developed, however, signs show that there may be challenges in allocating financial resources for this Agenda. In its report to UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Permanent Mission of Cyprus to the UN in Geneva pointed out that “the government does not envisage any changes in the budgeting process due to the SDGs at the moment. Many commitments, especially concerning ODA, are already included in budgeting due to EU obligations”.¹⁷

¹⁷ Permanent Mission of the Republic of Cyprus, Geneva. “Planning, Implementation, Follow-up and Review of the Sustainable Development Goals. Regional Survey by UNECE and the Regional UN Development Group

The responsibilities of Cyprus go beyond its ODA. The UN General Assembly reiterated that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development “is applicable to all countries, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development. [...] These are universal goals and targets which involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike”.¹⁸ It is important for the government to plan for adequately budgeting to implement this strategy and its various goals, which will form the country's blueprint for sustainable development. While a lot of commitments will also be falling within the implementation of existing policies or other strategies, it is also important to allocate adequate resources for the implementation of any activities that are not implemented under other initiatives.

Opportunities for a Possible Solution to the Cyprus Problem

Before closing, it is also worth noting the potential impact of the implementation of SDGs on a possible solution to the Cyprus problem. Intensive negotiations have been taking place in order to reach an agreement for a solution to the Cyprus problem. Should a solution be agreed and approved by the two communities, the focus of major projects across the island will be directed on reunification efforts. It will therefore be a unique opportunity to ensure that all such efforts also align with a sustainable future on the island. As people will be looking forward to a united future and will be rebuilding relationships, common infrastructure and in some cases entire urban areas, as well as investing in collaborative businesses, it will be a unique opportunity to put sustainable development at the heart of these efforts.

for Europe and Central Asia” Ref.254/81/6, 15 February 2016.

https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/sustainable-development/Cyprus_Regional_SDG_Survey.pdf accessed online 7 June 2017

¹⁸ UNGA Resolution 70/1, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (A/RES/70/1)

Recommendations

In conclusion, it is recommended that:

- A multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral National Strategy on Sustainable Development should be created and budget for as soon as possible. Adequate resources should be availed for its implementation.
- The Cyprus Strategy for Youth and the role that youth can play should be taken into consideration when drafting the National Strategy on Sustainable Development.
- Civil society has a distinct role to play in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the Cypriot strategy on sustainable development. Collaboration between government and civil society in this area should continue and grow. The government should also adopt the new law for NGOs in order to create a more enabling environment for them to operate and further contribute to the 2030 Agenda and society more broadly.

More partnerships should be formed as well as closer collaborations between civil society, media and research centres in order to promote public dialogue and government accountability.