

A Green New Deal



The Government favours a neoliberal model of development that has led to growing social stratification and rising pressure on the environment. An alternative could be the Green New Deal, which aims to address global warming and global financial crises by implementing a set of policy proposals intended to secure global sustainable development. Green Growth and environmental protection programmes must act as catalysts to create decent work and sustainable livelihoods for the most disadvantaged Polish citizens.

ATD Fourth World Poland

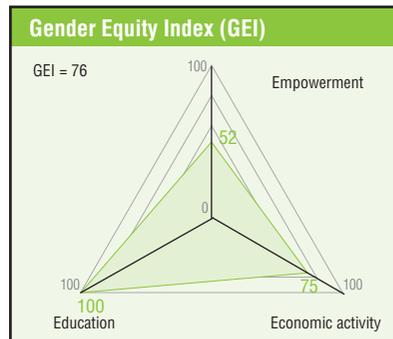
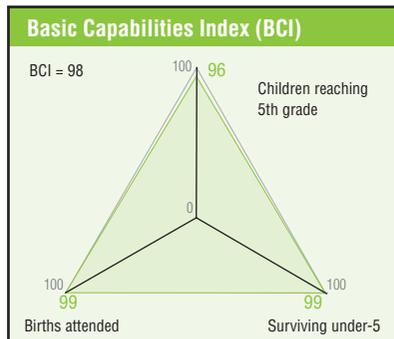
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Introduction¹

Poland is one of the very few countries that have introduced the concept of sustainable development at a constitutional level. According to Article 5 of the Polish Constitution: “The Republic of Poland shall safeguard the independence and integrity of its territory and ensure the freedoms and rights of persons and citizens, the security of the citizens, safeguard the national heritage and shall ensure the protection of the natural environment pursuant to the principles of sustainable development.”

Paradoxically Poland is also a country where any reference to the concept of sustainable development is rather difficult to find in public debate. In July 2000, for example, the “Poland 2025 – Long-term strategy for sustainable development” was adopted by the Council of Ministers with the clear objective to “improve the welfare of Polish families.” According to some experts, however, its overall impact is extremely limited: “[It] has met with no response from society and today hardly anybody seems to remember its existence. The average citizen does not know about the concept of sustainable development, nor does he or she have even the vaguest notion of it.” The authors go on to say that even people who have heard of sustainable development often consider it to be synonymous with environmental protection.²

In July 2009 the Government issued *Poland 2030. Development challenges*,³ intended to be the mainstream analysis and strategy line for development over the next 20 years. Written in hard-to-understand jargon it favours the “polarization and diffusion model” as opposed to that of sustainable development. Developed by the Board of Strategic Advisors to the Council of Ministers led by Minister Michał Boni, the report was not discussed in its initial phase and no alternative projects were com-



missioned, which made consultations impossible. The power to set the direction for the future of the country was thus given to a narrow group.⁴ Moreover in an interview for *Polska* one of the co-authors said that the departure point for the creation of this new model was the observation that “in reality, sustainable development is only a myth.”⁵

Unsustainability and the neoliberal model

The lack of implementation (or rather comprehension) of the principle of sustainable development inscribed in the Polish Constitution can be illustrated by the fact that subsequent governments have implied the existence of a conflict between environment and economy or between environment and society. Ways of addressing the current state of affairs, as presented by key politicians, seem to have been poorly prioritized. “The economy first, my reasonable Pole,” said Bronisław Komorowski, incumbent President of Poland, during a debate on the future of the Polish and European economies.⁶

In explaining the “polarization-diffusion model,” *Poland 2030* states that “apart from boosting growth polarities (i.e. polarisation processes), we have to primarily create conditions for diffusion – anything and everything which might support the process of equalizing education-related opportunities, improve transport accessibility in all parts of

the country, eliminate the threat of digital exclusion, improve social integration levels, structure and support intergenerational solidarity, and offer a sense of capacity to follow individual ambitions.”⁷ However the authors also define economic growth as a solid foundation for Poland’s development, along with “efficient administration and demographic potential,” and state that “current EU policy, as regards energy and climate security, is heading towards the reinforcement of Europe as a world leader in sustainable development. This, however, cannot occur at the cost of the Polish economy.”⁸

Here lies the biggest trap of the Government’s development strategy: Poles ought to tighten their belts in order to achieve a state of economic and social balance in 20 years time. But this model has led instead to increased social stratification, decreasing social capital and rising pressure on the environment measured by the total use of energy and non-renewable resources.⁹

The prevailing ideology was aptly described by Edwin Bendyk in the afterword to *Ecology: Guide for Political Criticism*. Noting that the dominant development discourse rested on neoliberalism and

1 This report is partly based on D. Szwed, “Green New Deal in the World, in Europe, in Poland?” in D. Szwed (ed.), *The Green New Deal in Poland*, (2011), <zielonystytut.pl>.

2 K. Kostrzewska and R. Piasecki, “Approaches to Sustainable Development in Poland,” *L’Europe en formation* n° 352, (2009).

3 Available from: <www.polska2030.pl>.

4 E. Charkiewicz, “Rozwój społeczny – próba diagnozy,” *Raport Krajowy Polskiej Koalicji*, (Social Watch, 2009).

5 A. Koziński, “Wojnarowski: Zrównoważony rozwój kraju to tylko mit,” interview in *Polska*, (29 June 2010), <www.polskatimes.pl/opinie/wywiady/275178.wojnarowski-zrownowazony-rozwoj-kraju-too-mit.id,t.html>.

6 At the opening of the Second European Economic Congress in Katowice, (31 May 2010).

7 Board of Strategic Advisors to the Prime Minister, *Poland 2030. Development challenges: Report summary*, p. 4., <www.kprm.gov.pl/files/file/Dokumenty/Poland%202030_%20Development%20Challenges%20-%20report%20summary.pdf>.

8 Ibid.

9 One indicator of total energy use is the ecological footprint. In 2007 there were 1.8 global hectares (gha) of biologically productive space for each inhabitant of Earth. Between 2003 and 2007 usage in Poland rose from 3.3 to 4.35 gha – i.e., an average of 241% of globally available ecospace for each Pole. If everyone consumed this way humanity would need 2.5 planets.

postcolonialism, he writes, "The former means the primacy of growth policy using free market instruments understood as a space for negotiations of private preferences that are only protected and not shaped by the state which is withdrawing from the management of interpersonal relations to the maximum extent. If at all, this can happen only under the influence of external commitments. This dictate, expressed in ideas like the climate and energy package or Natura 2000, is treated like divine retribution, a cost of membership in the club of developed countries. In fact, we are a postcolonial, developing country that was harmed by history and is still being damaged by the hegemonic centre that tries to enforce solutions detrimental to aspirations reflected in a desire to maintain economic growth."¹⁰

Neoliberal notions of the unfettered free market and of endless economic growth measured by GDP are wearing thin. The GDP does not reflect reality for it does not consider the country's low level of social capital, unpaid housework (done mainly by women) and increasing income stratification. Nor does it take into account environmental devastation, extinction of plants and animals, growing populations or the greatest challenge of the 21st century – the need to implement a global climate deal, which is a critical investment in our common future, as noted by the economist Nicolas Stern.¹¹

The Green New Deal: an alternative

The concept of the Green New Deal appeared first in a July 2008 report by the New Economics Foundation¹² in response to the economic crisis driven by credit bubbles, global climate change and increased oil prices. The authors stated that in order to avoid a deep recession comparable to the Great Depression it is necessary to undertake key structural changes both in the national and international financial systems, including the tax system, as well as make stable investments in energy savings and the production of energy from renewable sources.

The Green New Deal puts forward a set of policy proposals that aims to address issues such as global warming and financial crises by securing global sustainable development and creating a low emission economy. It also supports the development of modern technologies that are human-, environment- and climate-friendly, enhancing energy efficiency and greater use of renewable sources of energy, modern-

izing the building sector and promoting autonomous and sustainable buildings, developing environmentally friendly railway systems on the continent and changing the priorities of the EU Common Agricultural Policy. Like the reforms of the 1930s, the Green New Deal involves an active role for public authorities in the implementation of policies, in this case, for sustainable development.

In March 2009 prior to the European Parliament elections, the European Green Party issued its manifesto, *A Green New Deal for Europe*, which significantly develops this concept. The summary states: "As the economic, social and environmental challenges currently facing the EU are closely interrelated, they must be tackled together as part of a comprehensive package which for us is the Green New Deal. ... [This] is the only way of really delivering the changes to the way we live and work that will result in the reductions in greenhouse gas emissions which science shows will be necessary if we are to avoid the most disastrous impacts of climate change." It goes on to say that the benefits will go beyond the environment "to provide a major boost to the economy, lead to sustainable economic development and result in the creation of millions of new 'green collar' jobs in renewable energy and other future-oriented technologies." It adds that the Green New Deal will ensure that social and labour rights are not sacrificed in the name of competition and that public goods and services are provided so that all citizens can enjoy a good quality of life. "Greens will continue to defend equal rights for all within and outside the workplace, fight all forms of discrimination and intolerance and take the urgent action required to help the most disadvantaged in society."¹³

The Green New Deal in Poland also states that "business as usual" is no longer possible since it merely continues to push economic growth at the cost of the degradation of society and the environment.¹⁴

Building sustainable development

It is generally accepted that people living in extreme poverty are the most vulnerable to dangerous environmental conditions. One main issue for the poorest in Poland, for example, is housing quality. Roofs Over Heads,¹⁵ a coalition of 15 NGOs led by Habitat for Humanity Poland, launched a campaign in 2008 to raise awareness about poor housing conditions

in the country. There is no national policy dedicated to building homes for low-income groups, nor for assisting them with home improvements. Nearly 12 million Poles – almost a third of the population – live in overcrowded homes. More than 60% of apartments need serious renovation and more than half of the housing stock is more than 40 years old. Low-quality building materials and poor insulation are resulting in high monthly energy bills, making funds even scarcer for families that need to improve their living conditions.

People facing extreme poverty are often seen as responsible for environmental damage and thus an obstacle to sustainable development. This has to change; in fact, people living in extreme poverty should be included in all levels of policy making. Thus the Polish and international response to the challenge of sustainable development must ensure that new technologies and mitigation and adaptation programmes benefit the most vulnerable populations and build on their capacities and efforts. People in extreme poverty are often at the frontline of development initiatives that aim to transform their living conditions by improving water, sanitation or heating facilities.

Conclusion

Some authors believe that in seeking an alternative development model, "it is essential to accurately define the goals of economic development, environmental improvement and social cohesion."¹⁶ This gets to the essence of sustainable development. Amartya Sen argues that eliminating poverty and preserving the environment could be considered as "different parts of an integrated task."¹⁷ This means that environmental protection programmes could be used to obtain decent work and training for the most disadvantaged groups while maintaining respect for local cultures.

Green Growth must act as a catalyst for creating decent work and sustainable livelihoods for the most disadvantaged populations, building on efforts they are already undertaking. This is in line with the priority theme of a "green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication" of the forthcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012 in Brazil. ■

10 E. Bendyk, "Ekologia Polityczna dla Polski, czyli w stronę Zielonego Okręgu Stołu," in *Ekologia: Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej*, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, (Warsaw: 2009).

11 N. Stern, *Globalny Ład. Zmiany klimatu a powstanie nowej epoki, post pu i dostatku*, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, (Warsaw: 2010).

12 Green New Deal Group, *A Green New Deal*, New Economics Foundation, (2008), <www.greennewdealgroup.org/?page_id=53>.

13 European Green Party, *A Green New Deal for Europe (Summary of Manifesto)*, <europeangreens.eu/menu/egp-manifesto/>.

14 For a full analysis of the Green New Deal and the possibilities for its implementation in Poland, see <zielonyinstytut.pl>.

15 See the coalition's website: <www.dachnadglowa.org>.

16 X. Godinot, Th. Viard and H. de Courtivron, "Extreme Poverty and World Governance," Proposal Paper Series, Forum for a New World Governance, (December 2010), <www.world-governance.org/spip.php?article662>.

17 A. Sen, "Environment and Poverty: One World or Two?" address at the International Conference on Energy, Environment and Development, (Bangalore, India: 16 December 2006), <www.institut.veolia.org/ive/ressources/documents/1/166,Amartya-Sen.pdf>.