

Wasted words, empty policies



When the present Government came to power it announced it would support sustainable development, but it has not made good on these commitments. In fields like gender and energy policies and overseas development assistance Spanish civil society organizations have heard a lot of promises but the actual concrete results have been meagre. Today, as a consequence, there are no solid policies to promote gender equality or to work towards a sustainable development model that involves reducing greenhouse gas emissions or promoting the development of renewable sources of energy.

Plataforma 2015 y más

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In 2011 the Government moved even further away from the pursuit of sustainable development and turned instead to economic policies centred on adjustments and reducing public spending. In spite of numerous protests it has continued to reject any of the alternative proposals aimed at fiscal reform, changing the production model or implementing anti-cyclical measures that would help the country recover from the recession with policies based on people's rights. This change in economic direction marks the end of a political cycle.

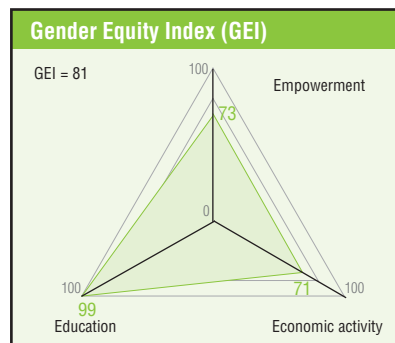
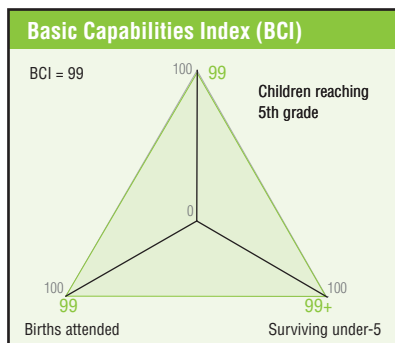
In this report we will analyse the evolution of the public policies that were put forward to promote the transition to a sustainable development model in Spain in three key areas: gender equality, environment protection and overseas development assistance.

Gender: empty promises

In its first term in office (2004-2008) the socialist Government tackled the problem of gender inequality with a two-part strategy aimed at social change. First, there were public information campaigns to raise awareness about the great inequalities between women's rights and those of men, and second, steps were taken to initiate a wide legislative framework in this area.

The effort to make gender injustice more visible led to the emergence of many spaces for debate in Spain, a society in which patriarchal attitudes and constructs still carry a lot of weight. However, progress towards overcoming the generalised tolerance of discriminatory practices and towards social change in favour of equal treatment has been slow, and the extent of the debate about this has made it increasingly evident that to tackle the problem public resources will have to be allocated and there will have to be political spaces geared to gender equity.

In addition to the campaigns to disseminate information and raise awareness there have also been institutional initiatives to try to set up a legal framework that is coherent with other aspects of the strategy to promote equality. This effort to enact legislation lasted from the beginning of the first democratic legislature until the end of the second. It bore fruit in the form of the Integral Law against Gender



Violence and the Abortion Law. There was a further initiative, an equal treatment and anti-discrimination bill, but this bogged down in Parliament and did not complete the whole legislative procedure.

Besides raising awareness about the problem and initiating institutional change, the Government set up a Ministry of Equality, which was a tangible expression of its political will to make gender equality a basic pillar of its other public policies. There was also a public declaration in favour of forming governments that were balanced in the sense that there would be the same number of women as men in the cabinet. This sparked off a debate about quotas as a means to break through the glass ceilings that are keeping women in Spain down, and it put the spotlight on subjects like the pay gap between men and women, the precarious labour conditions some women are subject to, and the fact that very often women find it difficult to coordinate their home lives with their work lives.

There is more information available today and it is managed better, and it shows that in general gender discrimination is still prevalent in Spanish society. For example, in 2008 the typical annual pay for a woman was 13,494 euros (USD 18,370), which was only 86.9% of the typical pay for a man (15,522.9 euros, or USD 21,131.6). In terms of mean remuneration the pay gap was 79.2% and in terms of average gross pay it was 78.1%. It works out that women's annual pay for a full time job was 86.3% of the amount men earned, and for part time work women received only 84.8% of men's pay.

What is needed to tackle this and many other kinds of gender discrimination is a sustained long term institutional, political and economic policy. To overcome the underlying causes of discrimination there will have to be a generalised effort from social,

educational and cultural sectors to bring about a genuine change in the country's culture, and this will have to be supported by the public at large.

However, in 2010 the Government started making cuts to public spending and this has had a negative impact on gender policies. In October 2010 the State apparatus was changed in various ways and the Ministry of Equality was closed down, which left no doubt what the Government's new priorities were. "Putting equality policies back under the Ministry of Health means the situation of women is a question of health again rather than a social matter, and this will cause bitter disappointment in many sectors."¹ The abolition of this Ministry gives the impression that setting it up in the first place, which was costly in terms of structure, human resources, dedication and innovation, was no more than a symbolic gesture.

The Government's failure to get the equal treatment bill passed into law has brought other contradictions to light. Just one year ago liberal labour reform legislation was passed, but shortly afterwards the same Government, under pressure from the ECO-FIN, the IMF and credit rating agencies, interrupted the passage of a law that would have made it compulsory to pay women at the same rate as men and would have extended paternity leave to four weeks. The bill has now been modified and these and some other less well known dispositions have been eliminated.

Not long ago the sense of solidarity with the victims of abuse, and pressure to use institutions, mechanisms and budgets to bring about far-reaching changes in our society and eliminate gender discrimination, were

¹ *El País*, (20 October 2010), <www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/igualdad/hoguera/recortes/elpepuesp/20101020elpepunac_26/Tes>.

reflected in Parliament by the progressive left, which supported the feminist cause in opposition to the right, which as always opposed any changes. But today there is almost no difference between the two sides in Parliament; they both have an orthodox neo-liberal stance and both are promoting economic adjustment policies. It seems that equality will just have to wait.

The environmental void: unsustainable energy

In the early days of its mandate, the socialist Government tried to project the idea that its international policy included strong support for multilateral mechanisms to promote environmental sustainability. President Zapatero was applauded for his celebrated speech at the Copenhagen Summit where he said, "We have to unite the world to save the earth, our earth, where there are poor people who are too poor and rich people who are too rich. But the earth does not belong to anyone, only to the wind."²

At the very centre of the Government's programme there were domestic measures to combat climate change and reduce CO₂ emissions, and this was supposedly a clear signal that Spain was taking its fair share of responsibility for the challenges the world is facing. The Government's plans to enact legislation to facilitate the change to a new production model that would be less vulnerable and more in line with the principles of sustainable development came to fruition in October 2009 when its sustainable economy bill came before Parliament. After more than a year and a half of troubled procedural delays the bill was eventually passed into law in March 2011. The final content of this lengthy document – 114 articles and 60 additional dispositions spread over 200 pages – was heavily influenced by the economic crisis and includes measures with little connection between them and some that even contradict each other.

With this legislation the Government missed an opportunity to set up coherent and effective mechanisms to lead the country towards sustainable development. As a consequence of this bungled effort, the sustainable economy law aroused nearly no public debate, and now it merely serves as a supposed achievement in the Government's empty rhetoric. This legislative process coincided with, and suffered from, policy decisions flowing from the administration's adjustment programme and its efforts to reduce public spending, so the law can hardly be said to meet the requirements of sustainability. In article 2 the concept of a sustainable economy is defined as "a growth model that reconciles economic, social and environmental development in a productive and competitive economy". The main point of reference is "a growth model", which shows that this law is geared above all to economic growth and is hardly conditioned at all by environmental concerns. A genuinely sustainable economic model would be based on natural and human principles and limits, but this legislation ignores essential points such as setting reduction targets, which is considered essential by the international community.

Another problem area is electrical power. The Government presented a Renewable Energy Plan (PEN) 2011-2012, but this has been criticized for disregarding the whole question of generating electricity by renewable means. According to the IPCC, countries like Spain should reduce domestic CO₂ emissions by 40% in the 1990-2020 period, but Spain has set itself a target of only a 30% reduction by 2020.³ This feeble commitment to renewable energy looks even worse when we consider that Spain is one of five European countries that together will be responsible for two thirds of the increase in emissions in the near future because the Government has invested in biofuels, which could generate an additional 9.5 million tons of CO₂.⁴

The Zapatero administration has also reneged on its commitment to close down the country's nuclear power stations. In 2011, in the wake of the tragedy at Fukushima, there was renewed public debate about how safe these installations were, but plans to definitively close down the nuclear programme have not been forthcoming. To make matters worse, the Government is still insisting that in the energy balance nuclear power should figure as "domestically produced", but this manoeuvre evades the inconvenient fact that all the fuel used in the process – enriched uranium- is imported. This is a way presenting the false impression of how self-sufficient Spain is as regards electrical power, and it is also a factor that makes it more difficult to integrate renewable energy systems into the power transmission network.

To sum up, policies that are coherent with sustainable development seem to have lost all their force as a result of political reactions to the global economic turnaround. This shows that these policies were regarded as little more than luxury items the country was able to afford in times of economic boom, whereas in fact the Government could have taken advantage of the crisis to make radical changes to its development model.

Empty international cooperation policies

Like institutional reform, another promise that has come to nothing is the commitment to raise official development assistance (ODA) to 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) by 2012. Social organizations have identified two very worrying trends in this area.

First, since 2009 public funding for international assistance has been cut a lot more than the general cuts in public expenditure. In 2010 and 2011 the resources allocated to international cooperation have been reduced by around 20% but overall public spending has only been cut by just over 6%.⁵

Second, the Government has also aided private enterprises in the cooperation for development area by fostering their capacity to invest in and finance foreign development projects, but it has not set any kind of regulatory limits on these activities. It would seem that not only has the Government been unable to maintain coherence or keep up the level of what was formerly a priority policy, but now it has sought assistance from the private sector to raise finance for development abroad. To help private initiatives in this field it has enacted legislation that makes it easier to internationalise companies and has set up a new fund to provide repayable loans for capital investments that serve to develop private enterprise. This might be a key tool in the near future because these funds are repayable so levels of investment can be maintained without generating a deficit. It is an entirely different question whether this instrument will yield results that are useful for the development objectives of the receiving countries or will be congruent with the aims of Spanish development cooperation.

In May 2011 a parliamentary committee was set up to investigate the whole question of assistance for overseas development. Civil society organizations criticized the committee's report, which was approved by the Cooperation Committee in Parliament, because it gives a lot of weight to private sector profits and carries the implicit risk that the main focus of overseas aid, which is the fight against poverty, could be lost. But this focus was the guiding principle behind the original reforms and improvements in the country's overseas development assistance policy, and these original reforms were supported by a broad consensus of the social and institutional actors involved in international cooperation.

Conclusion

All the signs are that gender equality will have to wait. Public policies that are coherent with sustainable development seem to have been drained of any effective content because of the Government's change of course brought on by the economic crisis. The inescapable conclusion is that these policies, which seemed so encouraging when they were first undertaken, were little more than luxuries the country could afford in times of economic boom. In a similar way, Spain's commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and invest in renewable energy projects have been discarded, much to the disappointment of people who thought the Government's pronouncements about sustainability and the fight against climate change would actually lead to concrete results. Another disturbing change is that in Spain's foreign assistance programme the Government has abandoned the fundamental guiding principle of fighting poverty. This was done so as to be able to bring in other actors, albeit with laxer ideas about sustainable development, but it could turn out to be a step backwards and might have unforeseeable consequences in a field that, by definition, is an expression of solidarity with poorer countries on the part of the Spanish people. ■

2 Speech at the Climate Change Summit, (Copenhagen: 17 December 2009), <www.psoe.es/ambito/saladeprensa/docs/index.do?action=View&id=428476>.

3 Greenpeace, *Comentarios de Greenpeace al borrador del PER 2011-2012*, <www.greenpeace.org/espana/Global/espana/report/cambio_climatico/20110919_Alegaciones%20PER%202011_2020_GP.pdf>.

4 Institute for European Environmental Policy, *Anticipated Indirect Land Use Change Associated with Expanded Use of Biofuels and Bioliquids in the EU – An Analysis of the National Renewable Energy Action Plans*, (March, 2011) p. 19, <www.foeurope.org/agrofuels/ILUC_report_November2010.pdf>.

5 See the Plataforma 2015 y más annual report *Balance de la cooperación española: crisis, estancamiento y debilidad política*, and *Política Globales Importan*, Plataforma 2015 y más, (2011), pp.45-56, <www.2015ymas.org>.