

HUNGARY

Can the National Framework Strategy on Sustainable Development Advance the SDGs?

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Hungary has played a significant role in drafting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Before co-chairing, with Kenya, the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals (2013-2015), in 2013 Hungary organized the Budapest Water Summit, the final document of which called for the development of a stand-alone Sustainable Development Goal on Water and contained almost the same elements as those in SDG 6 on water and sanitation: namely improving sanitation and hygiene services, reducing pollution and increasing the re-use of untreated wastewater (e.g., for irrigation or industrial use), integrated water resources management and the protection of the environment. As a result, Hungary will convene the Budapest Water Summit in November 2016, designed to facilitate the implementation of the goals and targets connected to water as well as to identify technologies that combine traditional water management solutions with efforts to adapt to climate change, ensure energy security, sustainable food production, protect biodiversity, and improve public health.

Despite this, Hungary faces a number of challenges with regard to the SDGs, primarily how to address the European migration crisis by taking measures to reduce one of its root causes—poverty—and how to finance this work with the help of the private sector and financial institutions. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without economic growth, equality, inclusion, justice and without the engagement of women and young people in education and business.

Hungary has played a significant role in drafting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ambassador Csaba Kőrösi, Hungary's Permanent Representative to

the United Nations, co-chaired the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals, with Ambassador Macharia Kamau from Kenya, taking the opportunity for Hungary to play an active role in shaping the global development strategy.¹

Earlier, in 2013 Hungary organized the Budapest Water Summit, the final document of which, the Budapest Statement, called for the development of a comprehensive Sustainable Development Goal on Water. The message of a stand-alone water goal was supported by an overwhelming majority of the international community, and the targets of SDG 6 reflect almost the same structural elements as in the Budapest Statement, namely improving sanitation and hygiene services, reducing pollution and increasing the re-use of untreated wastewater, integrated water resources management and the protection of the environment.

Following the success of the summit, Hungary will convene the Budapest Water Summit 2016 (28-30 November),² designed to contribute to the implementation of the goals and targets connected to water as well as to identify technologies that combine traditional water management solutions with efforts to

1. Sustainability: what are the main goals for Hungary? *Gazdasági Rádió*, 13 November 2015, available at: <http://gazdasagiradio.hu/cimlap/fenntarthatosag-mik-a-legfontosabb-celjai-magyarorszagnak-5105>

2. See Budapest Water Summit 2016, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, February 2016, available at: http://www.budapestwatersummit.hu/data/ext/BWS_PreliminaryProgramFINAL.pdf

adapt to climate change, ensure energy security, sustainable food production and sustainable cities, protect biodiversity, improve public health and eradicate poverty in all of its forms. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has also invited President János Áder to serve as a member of the High-Level Panel on Water that the Secretary-General will convene in support of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.³

Despite these positive developments the implementation of the SDGs is somewhat marginalized in Hungarian foreign policy, because the country has still very limited experience in this field and has only recently increased its contribution to Official Development Aid (ODA), which according to OECD reached USD 144 million in 2014, representing an increase of 13 percent over 2013. The ODA/GNI ratio also increased from 0.10 to 0.11 percent.⁴

The biggest challenges the country is now facing are those concerning how to reduce the costs of humanitarian needs by taking preventive measures and how to finance this work with the help of the private sector and financial institutions. Poverty is one of the root causes of the recent migration wave. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without economic growth, equality, inclusion, justice and without the engagement of women and young people in education and business.⁵

With regard to Hungary's National Framework Strategy on Sustainable Development (NFSSD) 2012-2024, issued in 2013⁶, there are also major concerns. First of all, without resolving serious social problems (such as eradication of extreme poverty) as well as without

exploring and dealing with the causes of unfavourable situations, such as the weakness of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the high level of unperforming loans and the deteriorating labor skills, no effective and durable solutions can be expected.

According to the NFSSD Hungary is currently very far from being in a situation that would satisfy the requirements of sustainability; thus a sustainable development path can only be realized gradually. The Framework Strategy represents the first step towards the sustainability, and it focuses on areas deemed the most effective ways to eliminate, or at least to mitigate the reasons for unsustainability. The Strategy deals separately with development and sustainability and it uses the concept of sustainable development in a broader sense, not limiting it to the environment even when not denying its primary importance.⁷

The Framework Strategy envisions development as an inseparable harmonious growth of the conditions and opportunities for good life of individuals and communities, as well as of the nation and humanity. It also notes that good life has not only a financial dimension, but also mental and spiritual dimensions. The term "good life" is a commonly used as synonym for well-being in the Framework Strategy.

The Framework Strategy document states that sustainability means that:

"at any given moment the generation creating its own wealth does not use up, it does not exhaust its resources, but retains sufficient quantity and quality for future generations by expanding them. To defend the interests of the unborn people, i. e. the interests of having no rights to vote, constitutional or other institutional limitations are to be set. The limits beyond which certain steps are not taken, or cannot be done are clarified, and to

3. Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB) vol 32, 23 April 2016, available at: <http://www.iisd.ca/vol32/enb3225e.html>

4. <http://www.oecd.org/hungary/hungarys-official-development-assistance.htm>

5. <http://kki.gov.hu/agenda-2030-the-future-of-development-cooperation-and-undp-s-role-news>

6. Parliamentary decision on National Sustainable Development. A framework strategy 2013., available at: www.complex.hu/kzldat/o13h0018.htm/o13h0018.htm See also: <http://nefe.kormany.hu/post-2015-en> and <http://nfft.hu/assets/NFFT-HUN-web.pdf>

7. Gyulai, Iván, A Fenntartható fejlődés, Fenntartható fejlődési stratégiák, Tananyag döntéshozók számára III. rész (Sustainable Development Strategies. Curriculum for decision makers), part 3, pp. 8 -12, available at: http://www.mtvsh.hu/dynamic/fenntart/ff_ffstrategiak.pdf

resist the temptation obstacles are set in advance.”⁸

The Framework Strategy goes beyond the usual approach, that which relies primarily on technical solutions as basic sustainable development tools, stating that: “The development of a sustainable society ...is wider; especially it is a cultural problem.”⁹ The basic question is how human communities can continually and successfully adapt to the constantly changing (economic, social, human, natural and built) environment, and how they are able to see the needs resulting from its own limitations. In essence the document sees the concept of sustainability as a new system of relations between people, societies and the natural environment in which human actions are determined by following a set of values. Mankind's response to this challenge is a cultural adaptation.

The Framework Strategy is resource-oriented, centred around four essential resources. Among UN Member States, the concept of sustainable development, reaffirmed most recent in the Rio+20 meeting in 2012, has three pillars: the economy, the society and the environment. In the Framework Strategy, there is a fourth pillar, the human dimension, considered an “outstanding priority for Hungary.”

Concerning these four main resources adverse developments are identified:

Regarding human resources:

- The population of Hungary is decreasing at a dangerously rapid pace;
- Hungary is lagging behind in enriching its knowledge and education;
- People's health is worse than what would be expected from the level of economic development;
- Poverty and social exclusion are significant

impediments to enriching education and protecting people's health.

Concerning social resources:

- Hedonistic attitudes among some sectors of the population, especially young people;
- Avoidance of risk-taking, in both politics and business; , and excessive reliance on the state;
- Low level of trust both in people and in institutions.

Regarding natural resources:

- The area of the natural environment is becoming smaller and smaller;
- About 90 percent of Hungary's natural ecosystem diversity has been lost;
- The elimination of natural areas, building construction continues at a rapid pace;
- Degradation threatens land fertility (soil structure degradation, salinization, erosion, decrease of organic content, etc.);
- Negative consequences of climate change.

Concerning economic resources:

- High level of dependency of the Hungarian economy on foreign capital, raw materials and foreign investment; high foreign indebtedness;
- Deteriorating community infrastructure;
- Little public or private investment in research and development (R & D) and innovation;
- Low levels of labour force participation and high youth unemployment;
- The acquisition of unsustainable debt for future generations, primarily due to the current economically unsustainable welfare system, the largest public spending item.

The country's economic growth and sustainable development approaches are only partially harmonized: the contradictions between the two

8. Tibor Faragó, A fenntartható fejlődés új ENSZ programja (The new UN program for sustainable development), 25 September 2015, available at: <http://www.greenfo.hu/uploads/dokumentumtar/a-fenntarthato-fejlodes-uj-enz-programja.pdf>

9 Ibid.

previously separate approaches currently appear in one strategy. The first approach identifies classic economic growth as a priority goal; while the second emphasizes environmental preservation and, accordingly, a shift to sustainable consumption and production patterns. The "decoupling" of economic growth and environmental destruction –referred to in the Framework Strategy –has so far not led to a reduction of the global environmental load in absolute terms, although it has contributed to a modest reduction in its rate of growth.

Although the strategy repeatedly emphasizes that the relationship between the goals and targets is important, it has serious shortcomings in that it fails to refer at all to some of the goals and targets.

Whether the 2030 Agenda can live up to its promise to advance the sustainable development process and further international cooperation in this regard will only be seen in the implementation process: provided that it creates a precise and transparent monitoring system, and to a large extent depends on the extent to which Member States adopt the goals and targets of global 2030 Agenda and adopt them to national circumstances, working together on achievable international objectives.

The success of the SDGs depends on the extent to which the agreed-upon global objectives become an integral part of the national discourse on development and manage to be incorporated into appropriate national sustainable development policies.

Key areas identified in the NFSSDS are as follows:

1) **Institutional development:** democratic, constitutional arrangements to create an enabling environment for the transfer of information and international integration experience, good governance, state, municipal and sectoral institutional development, capacity building, strengthened civil society organizations;

2) **Green culture, green economy, environment and climate protection:** rural and urban development, food security, sustainable agriculture, strengthened productive capacities, sustainable water management, sanitation;

3) **Human resource and capacity development:** education, health, culture, equal opportunities, protection of minorities and vulnerable groups, social institutional development, scientific knowledge and connections.

However, it seems that Hungary will be unable to deal with all of the above areas at the same time, because of limited financial resources.