

FRANCE

Implementing the 2030 Agenda: SDGs still seen as applying only to developing countries

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Based on past trends, France runs the risk of not reaching three quarters of the targets that are relevant to the French context by 2030. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are not a matter of developing countries that would only concern France in its external relations. They also impact French domestic policies.

The targets that risk not being met reflect the fact that they are not first and foremost issues related to environmental protection in the French context; instead, half of the targets that will be difficult to reach concerns economic and social issues such as employment, poverty, educational inequalities, gender equality and official development assistance (ODA).

The fight against extreme poverty and exclusion is one of the major challenges in France today. The country will not be able to reverse the trend without significant mobilization and quantified targets, which are unfortunately not foreseen at present. And yet, ensuring the participation of people experiencing poverty in policies affecting them, mainstreaming of poverty eradication and sustainable development, and setting human rights standards based on the guidelines on extreme poverty¹ are measures that are all possible to implement.

In 2016, France committed to the 2030 Agenda by signing up for a Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the country's progress on implementing the SDGs at the High-Level Policy Forum (HLPF).²

The report presented by Ms. Ségolène Royal, French Minister of Environment, Energy and the Sea (MEEM) reviewed the SDGs through an analysis of relevant sectoral policies. It provided an opportunity to highlight the role played by France in the policies already put in place to fight climate change and ensure environmental protection subsequent to the Paris Agreement adopted at COP 21, in which France has played a key role.

The Commissioner General of Sustainable Development of MEEM organized an expedited civil society consultation within a month. Unlike in other countries, the French Parliament had not been involved in the development of the 2016 Report. Nevertheless, an SDG governance framework has been established, although consultation of civil society was minimal in view of the required need to draft substantial analyses and make recommendations.

In 2017, at the last meeting of the National Council for Development and International Solidarity (CNDSI), 'lead' ministers have been designated for each of the SDGs. France will present to the HLPF 2017 an informal report centered on the six SDGs on the Agenda. In April 2017, the Ministry organized a collaborative day for the implementation of the SDGs to examine the governance of the French system and the participation of civil society, as well as the implementation of collaborative tools.

¹ http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/A-HRC-21-39_en.pdf

² <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10726Report%20SDGs%20France.pdf>

A web-based platform for wider citizen consultation as well as the enhancement of civil society initiatives that was announced a year ago has not yet been launched.

The National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) has published the set of SDG targets that are already statistically tracked by France. These number about 120: one-third already exist, another third exist in an "approximate version". Following this publication, a workshop on "how to make the indicators speak" is planned for June, which will involve civil society in monitoring the targets.³

Although the SDG provide a major tool by which to assess the situation in France, analyse the challenges and guide the priorities of future political actions with respect to the domestic level in terms of international solidarity, they are still very little known in France and often equated to development issues in the countries of the South. It is not encouraging to note that they were totally absent from the debates during the 2017 presidential campaign.

The future of the implementation of Agenda 2030 is entirely dependent on the political will of the future president of the Republic and the subsequent mobilization of civil society (associations, companies, trade unions, and academe). Europe has done so with the SDG Watch Europe alliance. In France, only associations for international cooperation are mobilized.

For the first time in its history, the United Nations has pledged to work to ensure that **no one is left behind**, to reach the poorest, and to speak of success only when all segments of society have benefited from progress. However, the 2030 Agenda does not bring about the paradigm shift that people living in poverty are calling for: human rights and dignity are mentioned, but their transformative power has not been fully exploited for lack of will. In various SDGs, the wording "have the right to" should have been used, instead of "have access to", as the former would assert more forcefully the power of people to claim their rights, especially in education, health, employment and citizenship. One of the major

weaknesses of this Agenda is the absence of this expression.

Analysis of SDG Implementation in France

This analysis is based largely on the report by four researchers of IDDRI (Institute for Development and International Relations) entitled *Will France pass the Sustainable Development Goals test? An assessment of the new targets and challenges that SDGs will bring to France*.⁴ The whole challenge of the SDGs is to create strategies to implement them. This study provides an overview of the situation in France, compares the national and international goals on a selection of 29 targets and offers a projection based on trends of the last 15 years, which would or would not lead to a number of SDG targets to be achieved by 2030, given the current political orientation in France.

France has been able to solve major challenges during its development process; however, the SDGs enable the identification of a significant number of challenges that remain to be addressed, and not only those affecting the environment. The analysis of the 29 targets (out of 169 in the 2030 Agenda) selected according to their importance in the French context, reveals that France is at risk of failing to achieve three-quarters of them by 2030, based on past trends. The SDGs therefore are not a matter only for developing countries; they concern France not only in its external relations, but also in its domestic policies.

For each selected target, the potential national commitment was compared, if one existed, with that of the SDGs, to retain only the most ambitious, with the idea of "adapting" the SDGs to the existing French objectives, as advocated by the 2030 Agenda.⁵

4 Elisabeth Hege, Julie Vaillé, Damien Demailly, Laura Brimont, *Will France pass the Sustainable Development Goals test?* Institute for Development and International Relations, 2017; available at www.iddri.org.

5 Para 55 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development stipulates that it is up to "each Government to set its own national targets guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstance".

3 <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2654940?sommaire=2654964>

The IDDRI report identifies three trends: likely to be reversed (the worst results), likely to be accelerated, and likely to be continued (the best results):

Trends to be reversed: Quality education, Equity in education, Employment: Fight against food waste, Biodiversity conservation, limitation on pesticide use, Violence, particularly against women.

Trends to be accelerated: Fight against poverty, Organic agriculture, Fight against non-communicable diseases, **Gender equality in economic life,** Access to sanitation, Renewable energies, Energetic efficiency, Efficiency in use of raw materials, Strengthening R & D, **Adequate housing,** Waste recycling, Reduction of CO₂ emissions, Sustainable fishing, Ecosystem protection, **Increase of ODA,** Increase of assistance to LDCs.

Trends to be maintained: Fight against corruption, Protection of marine environments, Limitation of air pollution, **Reduction of income inequality,** Sustainable industry, Wastewater treatment, Gender equality regarding sharing of domestic tasks.

These targets illustrate the fact that the SDGs are not — primarily or only — a matter of environmental protection in the French context: half of the targets that will be difficult to achieve concern economic and social issues such as employment, poverty, educational inequalities, gender equality and ODA.

What the SDGs can bring, in the absence of new commitments, is a new political impulse to achieve the objectives already targeted—which is much needed in France in the light of current trends.

Eleven “new commitments”, that is to say, quantifiable objectives derived from the SDGs, are new to France, or more ambitious than the existing French objectives. These include **targets for reducing inequalities, improving the school system, tackling poverty and unemployment.** These economic and social issues are already at the heart of French concerns and of the national political agenda. Moreover, France has already developed follow-up indicators but it is remarkable that they are devoid of quantifiable objectives, and it is equally remarkable that the SDGs already provide a number of such objectives. All of these objectives seem

very difficult to achieve if there is a continuation of current trends.

The SDGs therefore offer an unrivaled mirror of France's strengths and weaknesses on a variety of issues affecting the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere

The International Movement ATD Fourth World works towards the eradication of poverty throughout the world, using a human rights approach. It has focused its analyses on SDG 1, ending poverty in all of its forms. In this regard, Isabelle Pypaert Perrin, Director General of ATD Fourth World, pointed out that “the ambition set out in the title of Goal 1, “End poverty in all its forms everywhere”, is not reflected in target 1.2, “reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions”. If priority is not given to people living in extreme poverty, this target may lead governments to focus their efforts only on those who are the easiest to reach. This would then contradict the principle of leaving no one behind.

France has not yet adopted a national target to reduce poverty

The social protection system in France, the world’s sixth largest economic power, is considered one of the best in the world. Nevertheless, in 2014, INSEE counts 8.8 million people or 14.1 percent of the population living below the poverty line, which according to the EU definition, is 60 percent of the median income after social transfers.

This rate, which has remained virtually unchanged since 2010, is estimated to increase to 14.3 percent in 2015 (data for 2016 will not be available until 2018), representing an increase of more than 1.2 million people under the poverty line over the past decade.

The total amount of minimum social benefits remains well below the poverty threshold, estimated at €1008 in 2014, given that the Asset Solidarity Income (RSA) floor amounts to €499.

Three million children live in poverty, of which 1.2 million are in extreme poverty

The 18-29 age group will be the most affected by poverty, comprising 1.9 million young people, many of whom are not in school nor in training nor in employment. One quarter of the people living on the streets are between 18 and 29 years old and 90,000 young people leave the school system without qualifications every year. Fully 87 percent of French people consider that anyone can fall into poverty during their lifetime.

In fact, according to the Observatory on Non-Take Up (NTU) of Social Rights and Public Services (ODENORE), a very large number of people who are entitled to various minimum social benefits do not claim them: **in 2011, the non-recourse rates are estimated at 36 percent for the basic RSA and 68 percent for the RSA activity: almost two-thirds of the 1.5 million poor workers who are entitled to the RSA activity do not apply.** Non-recourse could involve **more than 1 in 2 young people, or 56 percent.** In its contribution to the multi-year plan to fight poverty,⁶ the National Council against Exclusion (CNLE) again reminds us that the fight against non-recourse must be at the heart of public concerns and based on the principle of non-stigmatization: "People in situations of poverty or insecurity want to be able to consider themselves as full, legitimate citizens in the exercise of their rights."

Improving information, simplifying procedures, ensuring better support for people in precarious situations must be a priority. Non-recourse does not necessarily constitute long-term savings. Poverty is not decreasing, people's health is increasingly impaired, health and social damage is increasing and weigh more heavily on the medical and social system.

⁶ www.cnle.gouv.fr/Contribution-du-CNLE-au-suivi-du.html

The poverty rate does not account for poverty in France in all its dimensions and in all its complexity because it is essential to take into account the interdependence with other issues such as health, education, housing, culture, energy or employment.

ATD Fourth World recently published the results of an international participatory research project on sustainable development, which included the voices of more than 2,000 people from all countries, the majority of whom are living in poverty. The results have shown that it is essential to move towards a multi-dimensional and participatory measure of poverty. According to organization's Director General, "this need is underlined by the term 'in all its forms' in the title of Goal 1 and the expression 'in all its dimensions' in that of target 1.2. They both show that measuring poverty goes beyond mere income-- even though the inadequate measure of income-based poverty (US\$ 1.25 per day) was still retained in the formulation of target 1.1".

The current minimum social benefits often lock people into the difficulties of their situation without sufficiently promoting access to employment and, more generally, to fundamental rights – family life, education, health, housing and citizen participation. In its Opinion dated 13 April 2017 entitled "Guaranteed minimum social income", the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE) quoted the need to reform minimum social benefits and proposed 24 recommendations for a new, inclusive Social Pact. The Opinion starts with the following quote: "It's good to be protected when you do not have a job, but the assistance kills, it's the opposite of dignity", said a recipient of RSA.⁷

Even though nearly two-thirds of French people still believe that poverty is not the result of a lack of will, and the rise in unemployment is not unrelated to this feeling, the poorest often remain victims of stigmatization. This results in discriminatory attitudes, including denial of rights or conditional release. For example, some municipalities determine children's

⁷ <http://www.lecese.fr/travaux-publies/revenu-minimum-social-garanti>

access to school meals on the professional situation of the parents. Local authorities wanted to require recipients of the RSA for consideration in the form of hours of volunteer hours, a form of compulsory 'free work'. Such situations are unacceptable.

ATD Fourth World Recommendations

- **Recognize people living in poverty as agents of change and as entitled to change (SDG 17)**

Unfortunately, in the 2030 Agenda, impoverished and marginalized people are perceived only as recipients of aid and programmes, and not as owners of rights or agents of change. They are considered in relation to their needs and not in relation to the contributions that they can make, along with many others, to the development of their community and to the progress of society as a whole.

The people living in poverty and poor countries should be the benchmark for each SDG. To leave no one behind, **France should decide that the objectives of its development and global warming programmes are only realized if they have benefited everyone, in particular the poorest 20 percent of the population concerned, at all levels, international, national or local.**

The Planning and Orientation Law on Development and International Solidarity (LOP-DSI), adopted in July 2014, recommends the implementation of the **United Nations' Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights**. It promotes the participation of vulnerable groups in the development, implementation and analysis of development projects. Mobilization is needed to ensure its implementation.

People living in poverty must also be considered as new partners of knowledge, particularly in the development of new poverty indicators to measure the progress in achieving the SDGs. In fact, most of the national and international poverty indicators have been built in a very technocratic way without taking into account the thinking of the people who suffer from poverty and who holds unique knowledge of what they are experiencing. As a result, not only do these indicators

provide a biased picture of the evolution of poverty, they also risk directing policies in a direction contrary to the expectations of the most deprived populations. This is why, in partnership with the Oxford Institute of Social Policy, Department of Social Policy and Intervention,⁸ ATD Fourth World has launched an international participatory research project, supported by French Agency on Development (Afd). It involves academics, practitioners and people in poverty on an equal footing in the action research on dimensions of poverty and how they could be measured.

- **Promote the national integration of the SDGs and commitments of the Paris Agreement (SDGs 1 and 13) into national planning**

Even in the northern countries, the poorest populations are more affected by climate change than are other groups. For example, people who are homeless or inadequately housed suffer from heat waves or periods of extreme cold far more than others, as they do also from a polluted environment. They cannot afford organic food or make the choice of what kind of energy they want. **The fight against climate change and the fight against poverty must be closely linked to integrated policies and programmes.** The energy transition law of 2015 begins this integration, notably by the creation of energy audits. It needs to be reinforced.

The transition from a mode of unsustainable development to sustainable development implies considerable changes in the modes of production and consumption, and such changes must be fair, that is, they must **promote climate justice and social justice**, as recommended by ATD Fourth World Movement whose arguments have been incorporated in the CESE's Opinion dated 27 September 2016, Climate Justice – Challenges and Perspectives in France.⁹

The concept of a just transition was adopted by the ILO in 2013 and incorporated in the Paris Agreement: it

⁸ <http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/measuring-poverty-differently>

⁹ <http://www.lecese.fr/en/publications/climate-justice-challenges-and-propsects-france>

calls for the creation of decent jobs, anticipation of training impacts and needs, sustainability of social protection, all of this while preserving the interests of future generations.

- **Combat discrimination on the grounds of social insecurity (SDG 10)**

In France, people in disadvantaged situations experience discrimination in all domains: in employment, where hiring is denied to residents of underprivileged neighbourhoods; in health, with refusals of care to beneficiaries of universal medical coverage (CMU - Couverture maladie universelle); in schools, where access to the canteen depends on parental employment. In June 2016, after years of struggle, the French Parliament has adopted **a law adding to the 20 criteria of discrimination one based on economic deprivation or poverty**. This 21st criteria of discrimination is a powerful tool to raise awareness and fight against discrimination. Public opinion and public discourse that too often stigmatize the poor should evolve gradually and promote universal access to fundamental rights.

- **Ensure quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. (SDG 4)**

In France, around one out of five youth quit the school system without training and diplomas and the results of our country compared to other European countries are poor. However, families in underprivileged situations place great hope in the long-term schooling of their children and their youth. The CESE has worked with parents living daily in extreme poverty and identified with them good, proven and effective practices then formulated an opinion, "*A School of Success for All*". These include **developing cooperative pedagogies** that allow the participation of all students; **strengthening the links between the school and the parents** by opening the school or college for formal and informal times; institutionalizing the analysis of practices among professionals, and so on. A collaborative platform provides access to all these experiences and recommendations (reussitedetous.lecese.fr).

- **Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all (SDG 8)**

It is important to recognize ATD Fourth World's initiative, "Long-term Zero unemployed territories", which led to Law No. **2016-231 of February 29, 2016: Territorial experiment to reduce the long-term unemployment**.¹⁰ This law, unanimously adopted by the National Assembly and the Senate, provides leverage for the action of employers, trade unions, local authorities and NGOs who want to commit themselves to hiring the long-term unemployed. It is based on three findings: 1) no one is unemployable; 2) long-term unemployment is not due to a lack of jobs; and 3) joblessness is not due to a shortage of government resources, since each year long-term unemployment entails many public expenditures (unemployment benefits, RSA, etc.) that could be used to finance jobs. It is therefore a question of proposing to all the long-term unemployed of a territory a job adapted to their know-how on a timely basis, relying on companies of the social and solidarity economy sector to create permanent work contracts (CDI) at minimum wage (SMIC). These territories will have been previously authorized by the Experimental Fund set up by the state for this purpose. ATD Fourth World, Emmaus France, Caritas France and the Civic Pact are engaged in this experiment, which will be carried out for five years and will enable others to join.

- **Promote the participation of people experiencing poverty in development projects funded by France**

Law No. 2014-773 of 7 July 2014 on orientation and programming relating to development policy and international solidarity¹¹ is in fact an obligation, as stated in Article 1: France "ensures that people living in poverty can be able to exercise their rights and

¹⁰ <http://www.zerochomeurdelongueduree.org/>.

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<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000029210384&categorieLien=id>

participate actively in development programmes and projects" and further, that France promotes **the guiding principles on the "Extreme poverty and human rights adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council."** Progress will be made by creating incentives for French Development Agency staff and the projects they finance to facilitate the participation of users, especially the most vulnerable.

In terms of creating new sources of development finance and social protection floors, our country must keep its promise to devote 0.7 percent of its GDP to ODA and improve the quality of this aid. Tax cooperation to combat tax evasion and tax havens would generate significant financial resources both in the North and in the South. A tax on financial transactions would also provide new revenue while curbing speculative movements.

Conclusion: Hope for the Future

Ensuring that nobody is left behind and measuring success for the benefit of all components of society is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. People living in poverty must contribute to development; their experience and knowledge must be fully recognized. National and international communities must recognize that people living in poverty have valuable knowledge that can contribute to the development of policies and programmes. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development should and could have made vulnerable groups, in poverty and social exclusion, with their experiences, new partners in promoting development by establishing cooperation and launching new forms of knowledge-sharing between them and other members of society, including academics, professionals and politicians.

On March 01, the CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research) hosted a colloquium in Paris entitled, *"Building Knowledge with Everyone? Participatory research with people experiencing poverty"*.¹² Co-organized by CNRS, ATD Fourth World and Cnam (National Conservatory of

Arts and Crafts) and a collective of researchers and professional and associative actors who participated in a "Seminar on the epistemology of participatory approaches and the merging of knowledge with people in situations of poverty" (2015-2016), this symposium was a great recognition of the "merging of knowledge" which is now authoritative in several professional fields such as health, education, social work, among others.

"I am surprised that it took so long for this meeting. Participatory research is indeed good research": opening the seminar, Thierry Mandon, Secretary of State for Higher Education and Research, paid tribute to ATD Fourth World. "What you are doing is vital," he said, referring to the role of the movement in promoting the participation of the poorest, after recognizing: "The word poverty creates a distance, the poor are at a distance."

Implementing measures and policies that affect poor people should be done with them. The lack of resources must be addressed. Tax and monetary policies can also be pursued and a financial system encouraged to transfer part of the savings to global needs. Political representatives must put in place necessary and fair reforms, as well as preferential treatment for the most vulnerable and for the least developed countries. For that, we will need a radical change in our way of thinking and acting. Institutions for inclusive and participatory decision-making, monitoring and evaluation of results will be needed.

If we look at the SDGs from a human rights perspective, instead of from a viewpoint of competition or complementary roles between developed and developing countries, there is a shared responsibility for all countries to work together to eradicate poverty in all its forms and to achieve sustainable development.

The challenge is to not only achieve the SDGs, but also, with equal importance, to walk together and to learn during this process to think, plan and act with those who are usually excluded. Over time, these actions will reduce inequalities, strengthen democracy and build peace.

¹² <http://www.onpes.gouv.fr/Construire-les-savoirs-avec-tou-te.html>