



Montevideo, February 18, 2020

Dear Watchers,

The year 2020 is starting with mass protests shaking a growing number of countries in various regions of the world. In Ecuador, Chile and Argentina, in Egypt and in Lebanon, millions of people are taking to the streets to demonstrate against the prevailing policies. The protests reflect growing discontent of people in different countries and regions with real and perceived injustices, rising inequalities and unjust adjustments and transition policies.

Governments mostly reacted with austerity policies to the massive increase in foreign debt and the deterioration in macroeconomic conditions. This was partly due to pressure from the financial markets, creditors, and international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which coupled the granting of loans to bridge payment difficulties with a reduction in public spending and a strict austerity-type adjustment conditions.

There is a great danger that the situation will deteriorate further in the years 2020-2021. In a comprehensive study, economists Isabel Ortiz and Matthew Cummins call global austerity policy "The New Normal" and predict a renaissance of the neoliberal Washington Consensus. In an alarming number of 130 countries, they forecast cuts in government spending and other austerity measures over the next two years. The regulatory and fiscal capacity of many governments (their policy space) will thus be considerably restricted - and thus also their ability to implement Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The implementation of the SDGs requires massive public investment in the areas of health and education, social security, infrastructure and climate protection. The vicious circle of foreign debt and austerity policies threatens many countries to move away from sustainability goals rather than achieve them by 2030.

In 2020, as we have been doing since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, the Social Watch network will contribute to the global Spotlight report and we will help disseminate the independent reporting of civil society and bring those findings to the United Nations High Level Political Forum (HLPF).

The HLPF is the United Nations body mandated by the 2030 Agenda to have a "central role in overseeing a network of follow-up and review processes at the global level." The HLPF will meet at ministerial level in New York, next July 7 to 16 and the theme will be "Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development". Further information available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2020>

Fifty-one countries will present their voluntary national reviews (see the list at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2020#vnrs>) and there will be regional preparatory meetings in issue-specific conferences between March and June.

In 2020 Social Watch groups are invited to contribute in two different ways that are not exclusive (national groups can do both):

- a) **a national alternative report**, looking at how your government is implementing its 2030 Agenda commitments. This can be a reaction to the official report of any of the 51 countries reporting this year, or to the official reports of previous years, many of which were not known to civil society with enough time to present their own alternative reports during the same Forum in which the official report was presented. It can also be an update of the reports of the last two previous years or a new report, whatever fits better your national lobbying and coalition-building needs. Those reports will be compiled and published in the websites of Social Watch and of the Spotlight report and their conclusions summarized in the introductory section of the global Spotlight report.
- b) a brief description or **examples of popular protests in any of their multiple formats, the policies that motivate them and the demands voiced by the people**. These contributions will be published in the website and might also be used as boxes in the global report, with due accreditation to their authors.

Format of national reports

Each national coalition can choose its own format and length for its national report, but in order to foster the sharing of experiences and allow for some comparisons, an “executive summary” of around 2500 words will be required. This summary will be widely circulated. The whole report in its original language will also be made available in the Social Watch website.

Deadlines

- **by 25 March Deadline for short insights on specific policies/campaigns** (a few paragraphs outlining the issue to be highlighted)
- **by 10 May** Final versions of national reports or their executive summaries. After that date we cannot guarantee that reports will be edited and posted online by the time of the launch in July. Reports received after that date will still be included in the website but will most likely not be published before the HLPF.

At the Social Watch secretariat we are looking forward to hearing from you about your plans for 2020 and we hope to be of help in your advocacy and campaigning.

In solidarity,

Roberto Bissio
Social Watch International Secretariat

Do not hesitate to write to us with any questions or comments: rbissio@item.org.uy or anaclau@item.org.uy