

Getting things right on Sustainable Development Goals

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A chaos-order continuum exists in all countries. There is no system that is completely chaotic or ordered. Even those showing some characteristics of chaos contain areas of law that are all too often ignored. What do states need in their process of transformation from chaos to order?

Bridging this space is key to state-building and promoting peace and prosperity. However, a meaningful transformation is a joint responsibility and needs a common vision.

There is always a gap between ambition and reality. The agenda for 2030, adopted unanimously by 193 countries, calls for nothing less than the transformation of our world.

Is the world going to meet the 2030 deadline? The year 2019 represents an important juncture in evaluating the success of the Sustainable Development Goals with the United Nations conducting a comprehensive review of the results of this global agenda so far, so as to reflect on the challenges and the way forward.

Four years after their endorsement, it has become apparent that the world is far from achieving the SDGs. “We are off track,” U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said during the SDG Summit, a high-level political forum held in September under the auspices of the 74th General Assembly, under the theme “Accelerating the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” He added: “Youth unemployment remains at alarming levels. Global hunger is unfortunately on the rise. No country is on track to meeting the goal of gender equality - without which none of the others will be met, and in fact, the gap in several is growing.” The event is the first U.N. summit on the SDGs since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in September 2015.

The summit has set out a political declaration, titled “Gearing up for a Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development.” The declaration aims for concerted action to meet the goals, with member states promising financial mobilization, improvement of state enforcement and local implementation, as well as strengthening structures to achieve the agenda’s sustainable development objectives, leaving no one behind. The importance of partnership and disadvantaged groups’ participation is highlighted as “inclusion is key to enhancing international peace and security.” The analysis identifies a need to accelerate change. Such transitions can only be accomplished by joint action from governments, corporations, communities, civil society and individuals.

Last week, Prime Minister Saad Hariri, launched the process of developing Lebanon’s SDG Vision for 2030, outlining a common vision and road map for the next decade. Over the past years, Lebanon has shown high commitment to the 2030 Agenda. Since its adoption in 2015, the government has taken many significant steps, including the creation of the National Committee on SDGs and the submission of the country’s first Voluntary National Review during the High-Level Political Forum in July 2018, offering an overview of Lebanon’s progress toward achieving the SDGs. This was preceded by several workshops with civil society organizations on the subregional level that ensured more participation, inclusion and building national ownership.

This is in addition to the initiative of the Global Compact Network in Lebanon that works on prompting the private sector to act for further progress toward the 2030 Agenda. This comes alongside many national strategies, policies and action plans that have been created over the last two years. Many of them are stepping stones toward the creation of a national vision that brings together all these approaches for the country’s future under one unified and prioritized target.

Lebanon’s 2030 Vision will contextualize a national strategy over the full duration of the 2030 Agenda with a longer-term perspective, consistent with national policy visions and objectives. However, this process should be advisory, cooperative and inclusive, culminating in a fully shared vision that is committed to focusing on disadvantaged people. Acting locally to achieve the SDGs ensures the global goals will have local impact.

This national vision can properly address the dynamic and interconnected complexity of sustainable development and contribute to the peace agenda and prevention of conflicts.

A 2030 Vision exercise provides opportunities for adding importance to the national vision while mainstreaming the SDGs in the national objectives, defining opportunities for national stakeholder participation and a normative role in the national context, as well as effectively balancing and incorporating the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.

Furthermore, it is an opportunity for identifying priority actions, drivers and structural changes needed to accomplish the SDGs as well as identifying longer-term assumptions and risks, in addition to formulating a collective understanding of the main blind spots and planning for uncertain futures, taking into consideration risk, prevention and resilience.

This will only happen alongside the engagement of national stakeholders in the long-term evaluation and identification of goals, including joining and building on national exercises of this kind, next to developing personal and institutional capacity to regularly focus on the interconnectedness of SDGs as a basis for facilitating coordinated and transformative development.

There are still 10 years to get things right. The good news is that the world is clear on what needs to be done and the challenges in getting it done. There have never been more tools and resources, but are we using the right tools for the job?

The 2019 SDG Summit is another call for urgent, targeted action to avoid losing the development gains of the last two decades.

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