

# **Regional Seminar for Parliamentarians in the Arab Region on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

UN House, Beirut, 8 – 9 November 2017

## **Keynote speech**

### **Stephen Twigg MP: The Political Dimensions of Sustainable Development**

Beirut – Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2017

We live in a difficult and increasingly dangerous world with conflict and humanitarian crises on seemingly every continent. The plight of the Rohingya, the horrendous situations in South Sudan, North Korea and Yemen are all crises which require their own tailored solutions. In this region alone you have the crises in Syria, Yemen and Gaza which all require a diplomatic solution. In the US, President Trump's agenda raises real challenges across many areas including for climate change, the UN and the future of USAID. Countries now face a very real choice between heading towards isolation and unilateralism or a rules-based multilateral system.

I became the Chair of the UK House of Commons International Development Select Committee in 2015. The role of the Committee is to monitor the policy, administration and spending of the UK Department for International Development and its associated public bodies. The Committee also takes an interest in the policies and procedures of the multilateral agencies and non-government organisations to which the UK contributes. The Committee is an investigative Committee rather than a legislative Committee one: it sets its own programme of work and chooses subjects for inquiries.

It's been just over 20 years since the UK Government, took the decision to make the Department for International Development its own independent department. Previously, the UK's development work had been administered through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, but this move signalled that development spending wouldn't be linked as closely to British foreign policy interests, but to the overriding goal of reducing the levels of extreme global poverty wherever they occurred.

With an independent department solely focused on the administration of overseas development assistance, the UK was able to play a leading role in the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals.

In the year 2000, UN Member States adopted eight goals which would shape the international development agenda to 2015. The Millennium Development Goals were ambitious but focused, and included commitments to: eliminate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality; reduce child mortality rates; improve maternal health; combat HIV, AIDS and malaria; and ensure environmental sustainability.

Significant successes were achieved under the MDGs. Extreme poverty around the world reduced by more than half. Child mortality rates halved too. Primary school enrolment

increased to its highest level ever in the developing world. Through education and vaccination, roughly 6.2 million malaria deaths were prevented.

After years of declining donor aid budgets, the adoption of the MDGs also coincided with a considerable increase in UK development assistance. DFID's commitment to achieving the Goals was enshrined in law, and the Department's contribution to their achievement was used as a measure of its overall success. The MDGs also became an effective focal point for public awareness campaigns as civil society mobilised behind their achievement. In the UK, the 'Make Poverty History' coalition organised a march of over 225,000 people during the G8 Summit in Edinburgh in 2005. That same year, Live 8 concerts highlighting the need for action were watched by over 2 billion people around the world.

However, even with their significant successes, the MDGs were not achieved in their entirety. Progress was uneven and inequality persists around the world. Part of the issue is that the MDGs were written without the voice of participation of the people who they were set up to help. They often felt as though the developed world was trying to provide a model for development while simultaneously ignoring the inequality and poverty in our own countries.

With both the significant successes and partial shortcomings of the MDGs fresh in their collective minds, the international community set out on a more ambitious and inclusive development agenda for the SDGs. My colleague Hugh Bailey spoke about this yesterday. Unlike the MDGs, which were formulated by a small group of technocrats at the UN, the negotiation of the Global Goals involved a vast array of stakeholders, from Member States to civil society organisations and the general public, through the global 'My World' survey. The biggest difference between the MDGs and the SDGs is the three foundations which make up the global goals; sustainability, universality and equality. While the primary focus of the MDGs was poverty eradication, the SDGs wanted the successes of development to be more equally spread around both the developing and developed world. This resulted in an incredibly ambitious set of 17 Goals and 169 targets, addressing some of the biggest global challenges of our time.

Building on the MDGs, the SDGs include more ambitious targets on education, health, gender equality and the elimination of extreme poverty and hunger. They also commit countries to confronting a number of wider challenges; tackling inequality, providing access to sustainable energy sources, promoting inclusive economic growth and decent work, ensuring sustainable consumption and production and creating just, peaceful and inclusive societies. Many of these issues are hugely challenging even for some of the world's richest countries.

In addition to the ambition of the 17 Global Goals, there is also the central tenet; the promise to 'Leave No One Behind'. This means that countries must ensure - not only that they are making progress against the Goals - but that this progress will be felt by everyone, including the most marginalised. An estimated one-third of all out-of-school children at the primary level have a disability. Caste inequalities remain a substantial barrier to healthcare. Gender inequality means that women are routinely excluded from participation in the formal economy and politics. Targeting these 'left behind' groups will require countries to collect disaggregated data, to find out exactly who is being excluded from progress, where they are and how they might work to improve things. It will also require *political* will to more evenly distribute the benefits of development.

The Global Goals lay out an immensely ambitious agenda for progress and their achievement will present challenges for all countries because, unlike the MDGs, the Global Goals are universal and apply to developed and developing countries alike. They are as relevant to us in the UK as they are to the people of the Middle East, Sub Saharan Africa or the Pacific. This in itself bring a new set of challenges. The 2030 Global Goals move beyond the traditional aid agenda of the richer, more developed, industrialised nations. But the goals were designed to guide and inspire all countries, encouraging each nation to take responsibility for their own agenda as well as helping with the agenda of their less well-off neighbours around the world.

This change in winds is already being felt in the way that the SDGs are reported. Many of the countries here – including Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Palestine have already reported your progress towards the goals, something *which we have yet to do* in the UK. I will return to this in a moment. I think this speaks to the way that the SDGs are challenging the existing aid dynamic globally, encouraging more state actors around the world, to help develop and finance an ambitious development agenda. This can only be a positive step towards ensuring we achieve the global goals by 2030.

The UK played an important role in developing and pushing the 2030 SDG agenda and that is something I am very proud of. However, the UK Government haven't been as focused on the implementation of the goals as they were in persuading the world to sign up to them. Despite the Government's previous insistence that the UK would be 'compliant' with the Global Goals, I believe we in the UK will face a real challenge in achieving them domestically by 2030. For the last 30 years the UK has consistently underperformed on addressing income inequality, compared to our OECD counterparts. *The top 10% in the UK have incomes that are on average 9x higher than those in the bottom 10%; considerably worse than other developed countries such as Japan, Australia and France.* The UK is also falling short in a number of other SDG target areas; levels of poverty, undernourishment, air pollution, water stress and renewable energy generation. Different SDGs present varied challenges for different countries. In the US it's climate change. In other countries it's human rights, corruption and good governance. In the UK, we have issues with poverty and sustainability which need to be addressed if we're to fulfil our obligations under the global goals. .

In 2015, we on the UK International Development Select Committee decided to ensure that the Global Goals should be a thread throughout all the reports that we produce. In our Report on the UK's implementation of the SDGs we welcomed the UK Government's continued commitment to the 0.7% ODA target. For the SDGs to be successful, we need the finances to back up the ambitious agenda. If all wealthy countries signed up to the UN target of 0.7% GNI on ODA, we could go a long way to achieving even the most ambitious Global Goals. We also acknowledged that the responsibility cannot just fall on Governments to deliver these goals, but a combined effort that includes the private sector, civil society organisations and multilateral organisations. We also concluded that the UK Government's response to domestic implementation had been "insufficient".

There are a number of countries that have made more progress in the domestic implementation of the Global Goals. In Germany there has been a national consultation on the SDGs to help to develop a sustainable national strategy that reflects the SDGs. This process is being led at the highest levels by senior members of the Federal Chancellery. Germany established a cross-department committee on sustainable development which ensures that all Government departments are working towards or achieving their targets set out in the SDGs. They also convened a sustainable development council, bringing together

senior representatives from the business, academia, civil society and the Government to consult on domestic implementation.

Norway and Finland have also had great success in their domestic implementation of the Global Goals. In Norway, each of the 17 SDGs has a coordinating Ministry responsible for the implementation and achievement of that goal. They also have to submit their progress towards each goal in their annual budget proposal. In Finland, the Government has produced a comprehensive National Implementation Plan for Agenda 2013, led by the Prime Minister's Office.

China too has established a domestic coordination mechanism, comprising 43 separate Government departments to deliver SDG implementation. The Philippines and Uganda have developed communication plans to increase awareness among the public to help build support for the radical agenda. 22 countries have submitted voluntary reviews to the UN on their progress towards the goals, with another 30 committing to producing national reports by the end of the year. These examples show that all over the world, in every hemisphere and continent, countries are making real and substantial progress towards the Global Goals.

Although these countries have taken significant steps towards domestic implementation, the International Development Committee have seen first-hand the work that is being done by the international community to ensure the goals are achieved. In 2016, the committee began a significant and wide-ranging inquiry into SDG4; Quality Education. As part of the inquiry, entitled '*DFID's work on education: Leaving no one behind?*' the committee had the opportunity to visit Jordan and come here to Lebanon to see the work being done to ensure that children fleeing from conflict in Syria are able to get a quality education. Both Jordan and Lebanon deserve praise for accepting these refugees, providing shelter and healthcare, and helping to provide refugee children with education. Delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals is only going to be possible if countries commit to meeting targets domestically, while also pledging to help other around the world through multilateral and bilateral means. While the UK has a positive story to tell on the latter, our domestic implementation isn't yet matching the best.

International progress towards the SDGs is tracked against a set of global indicators agreed by the UN statistical commission in March 2016. These help to guide the different national indicators, which allow countries to be flexible and to adapt to the different pressures each country experiences. All countries are expected to supply the UN with statistical data on their progress against the SDGs annually, to help inform the Secretary-General's report on global progress in July of each year until 2030.

One of the vital roles for developed nations going forward is ensuring that developing nations have the access and expertise required for them to report effectively to the UN on their progress. In the UK, the Office of National Statistics is working with DFID to help developing countries build their statistical capacity. The UK is the third largest provider of support to statistics globally which is helping to ensure that those groups that are often the most disadvantaged, including women, minorities and the disabled, are accurately reflected in any progress towards the goal. This is particularly important for achieving Goal 5; gender equality, and Goal 10; reducing inequalities.

So how do we as parliamentarians ensure that our respective countries are helping to achieve the Global Goals both domestically and internationally? The answer is very close to home.

Parliaments have a vital oversight role to play to ensure there is continued momentum and scrutiny for each Government to achieve the goals. And as already discussed during this conference, the GOPAC, Islamic Bank and UNDP handbook on parliament's role in implementing the SDGs is an extremely useful resource for parliamentarians.

The final Agenda 2030 document states:

'We also encourage member states to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels which are country-led and country-driven. Such reviews should draw on contributions from indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, in line with national circumstances, policies and priorities. National parliaments as well as other institutions can also support these processes'

A number of organisations have recommended that countries should follow the German model of establishing a committee responsible for cross-Government coordination and scrutiny of the SDGs. This can only be achieved if there is political will within a country to see the SDGs succeed. It also requires individual members of legislatures to pressure and scrutinise their own Governments on SDG implementation. Only if we all as parliamentarians push this agenda together will we be able to achieve the ambitious goals.

So, our role as parliamentarians is vital if our respective countries are to play a full part in the delivery of the Global Goals. My Committee is determined to hold the UK Government to account. And we are here to learn from parliamentarians from around the world – so I am delighted to be here today to listen and learn.