

Comments on SDGs zero draft

The following document summarizes comments made by Arab Civil Society representatives and other relevant experts (ILO, ESCWA) on the SDGs zero draft. The latter were gathered between the 14th and 16th of June 2014 in a regional forum in Beirut, organized by ANND, ARADO, ESCWA with the support of the Ford Foundation and the Dag Hammarskjold foundation¹.

Key to SDGs success: Genuine Political will

On the way to the adoption of a new development agenda by September 2015, discussions on the Sustainable Development Goals are intensifying. Yet, a list of SDGs without binding political commitments documented in an approved declaration will be another goal-oriented format. These commitments should reiterate the link between peace and security, democracy and good governance at the global and national levels, and addressing inequalities and exclusion. Therefore alongside the 17 SDGs included in the Zero Draft, there is a need of adopting a declaration that addresses the flows instigating the inability to meet the MDGs as planned 14 years ago. It would be endowed with political and legal significance. This will prevent the risk to reduce the process to the SDGs only, undermining the commitment to the political document, much like what happened when the MDGs became the priority instead of the Millennium Declaration.

Accordingly, this declaration should be binding and should represent an inalienable reference for the “post 2015” development process. It should emphasize the core principles behind the goals, including the common but differentiated responsibility principle. It should also assert them in realizing a new development paradigm. Furthermore, such a declaration should also allow for the separation between internationally defined development goals (defined in the zero draft) and would be a reference for States when they're setting their national developmental priorities.

Comments on the goals:

1. **On goal 1 (poverty):** *"by 2030, eradicate extreme poverty by bringing the number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day to zero.* The problem with the adherence to a \$1.25/per day threshold is that it does not take into consideration inflation, vulnerability nor daily income needed for survival and sustenance. Eradication of poverty should tackle means for eradicating its root causes, not setting a numerical threshold that does account for vulnerable people.

2. **On Goal 1.3:** the wording on social protection floors is still weak: *“fully implement nationally appropriate social protection measures including floors”*. A commitment by all countries to ensure a quality, nationally designed social protection floor for all people is here necessary and would ensure social protection floor as a human right. Considerations should also be made with regard to adequate policy space that allows for States to achieve their national priorities free of international bindings and “recommendations”.

3. **On Goal 2 (End hunger):** achieving food security and adequate nutrition for all and promoting sustainable agriculture should explicitly refer to ensuring food sovereignty. In this regard the related **goal 2.11** *“by 2030 fully implement measures that curb excessive food price volatility and ensure proper functioning of markets”* should be extended to ensure trade policies and agreements are revisited to facilitate developing countries' domestic agricultural production and safeguard domestic producers from unfair trade policies and competition in order to ensure food sovereignty. With regard to “the proper functioning of the market” trade liberalization should be well assessed, as more liberalization would only lead to increased food insecurity. As noted by Olivier de Schutter *“states have to conserve their space and freedom to enact policies that protect local markets from food prices volatility on the international market. It is also essential for states to have the necessary flexibility to protect their market against abrupt and brutal import waves. Programs aiming at managing offer and demand and others aimed at managing markets in this sense, are essential”*².

¹ For more information on the meeting, please visit: <http://www.annd.org/english/eventId.php?eventId=51>

² Quote adapted from the website of UPA (Union des producteurs agricoles du Quebec) and is translated from French. Available at: <http://www.upa.qc.ca/ScriptorWeb/scripto.asp?resultat=176724>

4. The availability of disaggregated data is well integrated in the Zero Draft yet it should be enhanced to include the accessibility of disaggregated data, in line with the right to information.

5. **Goal 8.5** calls for “creating a sound macroeconomic environment with strong fiscal and monetary policies” The fiscal and monetary economy has to serve the real economy through development strategies such as: economic diversification, employment creation, development of productive capacities, long-term public investments in vital social sectors such as health and education, as well as selective trade protections, financial regulation and industrial policy tools, technological upgrading among other flexibilities to create a domestic economic foundation. Most of these strategies require States that have enough policy space. The latter would be guaranteed by the special and differential treatment principle in multilateral trade and the Rio principle of common but differential principles, among others.

6. **Goal 8.16:** “*explore the possibility of a broader system of capital accounting looking beyond GDP and incorporating social, human and environmental capital*” is quite timid with its wording “explore the possibility” in comparison to all other goals calling for “ensure, respect, achieve...etc. Given all the calls for a human centered development approach, the three dimensions of development and a well-integrated framework for it, there is a need to use more assertive and sound wording than “explore”.

7. The proposed **goal 9**. Promote sustainable industrialization and the **goal 9.2** that calls for the respect of the national policy space and national circumstances for industrial development, particularly in developing countries, are welcomed steps.

8. Reducing inequality is now a separate goal -**Goal 10:** increasing the number of goals to 17 is also very positive. Yet there is no mention of ensuring fair distribution of wealth; a prerequisite for equality. There is also no reference to the respect of extraterritorial obligations, which is a clearly needed international action to prevent violations of economic and social rights and to reduce inequalities. Furthermore, the 10th goal’s text lags behind in terms of redistribution policies at a national level, their importance in reducing inequalities and means for ensuring States are able to provide adequate redistribution policies, chiefly among them, taxation regimes and policies.

9. With regard to **Goal 12**, on Promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns, **goal 12.2** reads as follows: “*by 2030 achieve sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources to enhance human welfare within the carrying capacity of ecosystems*”. It should be extended to also include people’s sovereign rights on their natural resources including water and land. Moreover, a clear reference to the right to self-determination must be made as it is evident that the absence of people’s sovereignty on their resources is an infringement of their right to self-determination. True development cannot take place without freedom of individuals and nations and this is particularly the case for Palestinians under the Israeli occupation.

10. **Goal 12.9** calls for *an increase by x% of the number of companies, especially publicly listed and large companies, reporting on corporate social and environmental responsibility, including integrated reporting by 2030*. This should be strengthened by binding Human Rights Obligations for the private sector rather than aiming a sole increase. The reporting should be also regular and publicly available. They should assess the environmental and human rights impacts and identify steps to mediate them.

11. With regard to **Goal 16**, whereby goal **16.3** reads that “*by 2030 reduce illicit financial flows by x% and reduce money laundering and all forms of organized crime including human trafficking and illicit trade in arms, drugs and wildlife*”, the goal should be strengthened by calling for an end to illicit financial flows as developing countries are losing more than \$1tn (£614bn) a year in illicit financial flows.

12. **Goal 16.14** related to improving access to information is positive. Yet, there should be an explicit reference that covers all relevant policy areas including economic, social, financial and environmental fields. It should also explicitly note that such information should be timely available, of high-quality, accessible, reliable and disaggregated. Information related to policy choices/priorities and budgets should also be made available. This covers PPPs and dealings that take place between States and International Institutions, primarily IFIs.

13. Within *Means of Implementation*, **Goal 17.5** ensures that adequate policy space is given to developing countries by international organizations to enable developing countries to establish and implement their policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development. **Goal 17.6** supports broad-based multi-stakeholder partnerships, including with civil society, the private sector, and multiple levels of government, that mobilize knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources to support the achievement of sustainable development goals, particularly in developing countries. These are positive and welcome. However, it should also be specified that “ensuring that an adequate policy space is given to developing countries by international organizations” also passes by a revision of the current Trade and Investment Frameworks and the related WTO and free trade agreements signed nationally and regionally (mentioned in point 15).

14. **MOI 17.20** calls for PPPs in energy, stated as “*encourage public and private sector investment, in particular public-private partnerships, in energy infrastructure and cleaner energy technologies*” yet it neglects the lack of appropriate legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks to safeguard citizens human rights in developing countries. It also forgoes conditions related to equality between the State and the Private sector in PPPs.

15. There is a strict adherence to the WTO’ Bali Declaration in **MOI 17.22**, that states: “*promote an open, rules-based, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system, including complying with the mandate for agriculture, services and non-agricultural products of the World Trade Organization Doha Round and implementing the outcomes of the World Trade Organization Bali Declaration*”. Yet, it should be well noted that the Bali package is unbalanced; decisions related to issues of concern for developing countries, especially the food security proposal and least developed countries' issues, were drafted in legally non-binding wording that does not offer enough guarantees to developing and least developed countries, whereas the trade facilitation agreement was adopted based on binding rules that oblige member countries to comply with practices based on developed countries' experiences and approaches. This results in a very constrained policy space for developing countries and is contradictory to **goal 17.5**.