

## Reports from the bottom up: “The road is hazy and full of obstacles”

BY ROBERTO BISSIO, SOCIAL WATCH

When asked about how countries are implementing the 2030 Agenda and the obstacles encountered, civil society groups and coalitions affiliated with Social Watch around the world generally agree that their governments recognize the political weight of the new international consensus. The report from Cyprus (authored by the research and development center CARDET) is the only one identifying the non-binding nature of the agreement as a potential excuse for “a long established government inertia.”<sup>1</sup> Many other difficulties of different nature are identified in different countries, but it is also clear that most governments feel that the 2030 Agenda cannot be ignored and citizens are organizing in new ways to demand accountability towards the promises made.

### Growth or the Planet?

“With reference to the 2030 Agenda, there are progress and setbacks,” writes Héctor Béjar on behalf of the Social Watch coalition in Peru. “GDP grew, but inequality grew as well. The mafias that exploit drug trafficking, illegal mining and smuggling continued to concentrate wealth, which then left the country through profits of foreign companies that enjoy lower taxes than national companies. Monetary poverty of less than US\$ 1.25 a day has declined, but multidimensional poverty has risen to critical levels. Maternal and infant mortality were reduced, but the anemia of women and children, unwanted and premature adolescent pregnancies and deaths from abortion and postpartum hemorrhage have remained.”

The growth vs. the planet dilemma is true in Peru as in many other countries: Since the start of this century, Peru has experienced sustained economic growth

Every year groups and coalitions affiliated to the global Social Watch network report on their countries’ progress or regression towards the internationally agreed development goals. As the new 2030 Agenda starts being implemented, many UN member states are still trying to figure out what this new global consensus means for them and how to rebalance among different demands and priorities. In that process, the voices of citizens need to be heard. The country reports 2016 are available at [www.socialwatch.org](http://www.socialwatch.org)

due to rising prices of gold, copper and other products exported by transnational companies operating in the country. GDP growth has been achieved at a high environmental cost and with a strong social polarization between, on the one hand, the mining, fishing and logging companies (virtually the entire territory is given in concession to extractive industries) and, on the other, local populations. As a result, Peru is on the list of the ten countries with the most environmental conflicts in the world.

A very similar situation is reported by Pakorn Lertsatienchai, Ranee Hassarungsee, Tatikarn Dechapong and Pattraporn Chuenglertsiri from the Social Watch coalition in Thailand: “In the interests of development, local resources are extracted and exploited in many ways, including petroleum extraction facilities, deforestation, large-scale land purchasing, water management, and even tourism. Around the Thai Gulf development plans include construction of industrial estates, deep-water ports, several nuclear and coal power plants, steel manufacture and other factories. People in the study area angrily expressed that, ‘fending for ourselves and families is hard enough, but we still have to fight capitalists, authorities and the state that supports the capitalists.’”

<sup>1</sup> For the full text of the country reports quoted in this article as well as the complete identification of their authors and associated institutions, see [www.socialwatch.org](http://www.socialwatch.org).

In Hungary, this contradiction between economic growth and sustainable development is recognized by the new National Framework Strategy on Sustainable Development (NFSSD) 2012–2024, issued in 2013. This strategy has adopted the term “good life”, first coined in Latin America as “buen vivir” and promotes the “decoupling” of economic growth and environmental destruction. However, Matyas Benyik from ATTAC Hungary comments that it has so far not led to a reduction of the global environmental load in absolute terms (about 90% of Hungary’s natural ecosystem diversity has already been lost) and socially it faces the problem of a rapidly shrinking population, with increasing poverty and social exclusion, that in turn relates to poor health and education services.

### Money flows up, not down

At the other extreme, population growth is a big problem for Jordan, where the high fertility rate (population grew by 3.86% in 2014) and the influx of one million Syrian refugees are increasing deterioration in the quality and quantity of the poorly managed water resources of one of the world’s most water-starved countries. Nevertheless, Ahmad Awad from the Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies, identifies “lack of good governance” as the main obstacle to achieving the SDGs in Jordan. “Political participation, freedom of the press, the status of women, and the role of civil society still constitute outstanding challenges.”

However, in Bangladesh, the report (prepared by EquityBD with the contribution of Synergy Bangladesh and Unnayan Shamannay) states that “since the 1990s, when democracy was reinstated and some major economic reforms were made, the economy has experienced impressive growth, and the country has made praiseworthy progress in education, health and gender equity.” The 1991–92 poverty rate of 56.7 percent was reduced to 31.5 percent in 2010. But this is still a very high number and with a national budget deficit of 5 percent of GDP it cannot be eradicated in fifteen years without international support. In terms of climate change alone, in 2011 it was estimated that the direct annual cost to Bangladesh for natural disasters over the previous 10 years was between 0.5 and 1 percent of GDP –plus another US\$ 5.7 billion in

adaptation costs, owing to increased risks of cyclones and inland monsoon floods by 2050.

Bearing almost no, or very minimum responsibility for global warming or climate change, Bangladesh is one of the most affected countries from this phenomenon. It is obvious to Bangladeshis that “funds should come from the countries which are historically responsible for the impact of climate change, along with needed technology and capacity building support.” But this has not happened. Bangladesh needed foreign assistance of at least US\$ 3 billion per year, but from 1990–91 to 2013–14 it only received on average US\$ 1.74 billion per year in ODA.

In addition, Bangladesh also experiences high levels of Illicit Finance Flows (IFFs) to other, mainly developed, countries. It is estimated that in 2013, IFFs reached about 7 percent of GDP, a sum 11 times greater than the foreign assistance received that year. The Central Bank of Switzerland observed that while overall, illicit financial flows to Switzerland are declining, at the same time they are skyrocketing out of Bangladesh.

Malta is one of the tax heavens channeling illicit flows out of poor or impoverished countries, ranking 27<sup>th</sup> in the list of countries listed as tax havens in 2015 by the Financial Secrecy Index. J. M. Sammut, from the Maltese NGO Kopin condemns tax evasion and money laundering as “two major causes of global poverty and injustice”. Recently, Malta was linked to corruption scandals “exposing the use of Malta as a tax haven for companies which are not paying any tax money in countries that have high poverty and inequality rates, such as Angola and Brazil. These companies are legally allowed to avoid paying any tax in their homeland, whilst paying a small percentage to a developed country, in this case, Malta.” Since the principle of redistributive taxation has an important role to play in sharing the common good and building equitable and just societies, the Maltese call on their Government, as part of the 2030 Agenda strategy, “to do their utmost to highly penalize tax evaders.”

Switzerland ranks first in the global Financial Secrecy Index computed by the Tax Justice Network and the Swiss Social Watch report, prepared by Eva

Schmassmann and Jürg Staudenmann, on behalf of the NGO coalition Alliance Sud argues that “there is no Swiss strategy to stop the outflow of tax money out of developing countries. (...) Swiss banks held 2,300 billion Swiss francs in foreign deposits and a tax haven Switzerland hosts the headquarters of hundreds of transnational corporations and is responsible for the outflow of private fortunes from developing countries as well as the transfer of corporate profits made in Southern countries. Swiss tax and financial policies facilitate a global race to the bottom, further reducing global corporate taxation and forcing many states to cut their budgets even more.” Alliance Sud concludes that Switzerland’s business model will continue to contradict the goals of the 2030 Agenda so long as “only the minimum OECD and G20 tax transparency requirements are applied”, arguing that the country should “proactively promote tax transparency in financial accounting as well as corporate reporting, both of which should also benefit developing countries.”

The issue of tax havens and IFFs appears often in this year’s country reports. For example, Social Watch Philippines writes that “corporations rule Philippine development, aided by government policies and public-private partnerships (PPPs).” Corporations control the commanding heights “surrendered by the government” in areas such as land, water, electricity, transportation and communication, banking and finance, media, schools, hospitals, sports and entertainment. They run an economy powered by fossil fuels. They take the lion’s share of wealth and income of the nation. They are beneficiaries of tax incentives and may also be responsible for illicit financial flows which run into billions of forgone revenues.

In Argentina, newly elected President Mauricio Macri started at the end of 2015 with drastic changes in economic policies, including a permanent cut in export taxes that economists Joseph Stiglitz and Martin Guzman called “a large transfer to the wealthy, at great cost to ordinary workers. Whatever the efficiency

benefits, the distributive consequences and development implications cannot be ignored.”<sup>2</sup>

These changes, according to the Argentinian Social Watch report, authored by Valeria Chorny, Bárbara García and Vilma Paura from FOCO and Luna Miguens, Leandro Vera Belli, Santiago Sánchez and Eduardo Reese from CELS, include “the devaluation of the peso of almost 60 percent, the reduction or elimination of export taxes and the elimination of controls and the reduction of taxes on luxury goods. The result was a surge in inflation and a massive transfer of resources to the powerful. Further, the liberalization of imports, the reduction of credits to small and middle enterprises and the rise in interest rates (to slow down the increase in the value of the dollar) are a main obstacle to the medium and small scale production system that creates the most jobs.”

### Scandals and more scandals

In Guatemala in 2015 hundreds of thousands of peaceful demonstrators forced the resignation of the president, general Otto Pérez Molina and the vice-president, Roxana Baldetti, accused of having organized a corruption network at the highest level. “It was a victory for mobilized civil society, made possible by the action of national prosecutors and the support of the international community through the “International Commission against Impunity”, an ad hoc body of the United Nations in Guatemala to strengthen the justice system and fight the parallel bodies and underground machinery imbedded in the State” report Helmer Velasquez and Arlyn Jimenez from Congcoop.

“The social task of reforming the State is only starting and it will be a long process to strengthen public institutions and at the same time find solutions to the centuries old deprivation of the majority indigenous populations,” comments the Guatemalan Social Watch coalition.

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2 Stiglitz, Joseph/Guzman, Martin (2016): Argentina’s Uncertain Prospects. Project Syndicate 29 January 2016 ([www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/macri-argentina-economic-uncertainty-by-joseph-e--stiglitz-and-martin-guzman-2016-01](http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/macri-argentina-economic-uncertainty-by-joseph-e--stiglitz-and-martin-guzman-2016-01)).

This process has been inspiring for the Central American region and in neighbouring Honduras a new social movement has emerged, brought together by the fight against corruption. The movement is formed by different social organizations at the margin of political parties and institutionalized civil society, and several demonstrations of the “indignados” (outraged) demanded the creation of an internationally supported investigation commission similar to the one in Guatemala.

Suyapa Martinez, from the Centro de Estudios de la Mujer details in the Social Watch report the need for improved social auditing in Honduras: Last year women’s advocacy succeeded in including in the budget articles aimed at earmarking for gender-specific budget items. But those articles have not been implemented. Similarly, although laws were passed to institute Credimujer, a loans programme for rural women, no budget has been approved to make it happen. The law requires that 5 percent of the transfers to municipalities should be spent in programmes and projects aimed at women, but those resources have been channeled instead to the “better life” programme of the First Lady.

Globally, the “Panama Papers” brought the issue of corruption, tax avoidance and money laundering to the forefront of international attention, but outrage does not always lead to action. In the Czech Republic, for example, it has been reported that “the Government welcomes the reform of the global tax rules and standards that significantly affect the ability of governments to collect taxes and will prevent the utilitarian transfer of profits to countries with more favourable taxes”.

But the national Social Watch report, edited by Tomáš Tožička, argues that although the Czech Government agrees with the involvement of developing countries in negotiations on tax issues, it “does not support the efforts to promote and extend the current mandate of the UN Committee of Tax Experts” to create an intergovernmental authority for tax issues. Although the Ministry of Finance supports the adoption of the automatic exchange of information “with as many jurisdictions as possible”, the inclusion of developing countries has not been explicitly mentioned.

And while the fight against tax evasion is one of the priorities of the Government, little attention is paid to the avoidance of tax obligations on the part of large corporations.

“One of the first challenges for effective implementation of actions to meet the SDGs is to secure ongoing State funding, which requires a fair tax reform that makes it possible to implement needed social programmes,” argues the report from El Salvador. Over the last three years, civil society organizations in El Salvador have promoted the need for tax justice through proposals to curtail tax evasion, which in 2013 was estimated at 28 percent of all taxes due.

While some countries suffer from massive tax evasion, others just do not bother to levy significant taxes. In Guatemala, for example, total government revenues, at 11 percent of GDP, are one of the lowest in the region. The situation is aggravated by legal mechanisms that grant privileges and tax exemptions, as well as by a parallel financial system that makes tax fraud and tax evasion easy. The resulting budget deficit has to be covered through indebtedness. Social expenditures are a low priority and while small farmers receive a mere US\$ 141.49 per capita per year in total assistance, over 9 percent of the budget is directed towards the police and the military.

In Paraguay, Verónica Serafini Geoghegan from Decidamos, reports that poor revenue is the result of an implicit and at times explicit deal, where the rights of citizens (to health, education, housing, security, etc.) are never met and the struggle against inequalities, corruption and massive prevalence of poverty is made impossible. Again, debt is the mechanism to fund infrastructure. Roads are built that mainly benefit large agriculture exporters. When the World Bank and the IMF warn about the unsustainability of that debt, PPPs are introduced as a solution. The problem with PPPs, argues the report from Paraguay, is that they end up generating liabilities for the State that were not approved in any budget law. “PPPs lack transparency and the governmental guarantees for private projects are never properly registered or accounted for, all of which can only increase inequalities in the future.”

### Inequalities

Inequalities, frequently associated with unfair tax systems and other structural asymmetries in power and access to resources is an obstacle identified by many country reports. Even in Finland, which is listed among the countries with the best income distribution in the world, the national NGOs, grouped in KEPA, report to Social Watch that SDG 10 will be “a challenge” since “inequality in income has doubled in the last 10 years.” As a result, “halving poverty in Finland by the year 2030 will also require strong efforts as 17 percent of the population is considered at risk of poverty and social exclusion.”

In Kenya, a post-colonial African society still faces today inequalities rooted in colonialism. The Kenyan Social Watch report by Edward Oyugi (Sodnet) and Oduor Ongwen (SEATINI) explains:

“The logic went as follows: development policy must follow the regional distribution of so-called high potential economic activities. This concentrated all development resource inputs into the green parts of the country, since agriculture continued to be the main driver of both colonial and post-colonial economies. It follows, therefore, that good roads, good and well-equipped schools, better health facilities and the whole structural weight of state-bureaucratic hegemony provided the template and rationale for unequal distribution of basic public resources and services, leading to overall unequal development and deep-seated inequalities across the board. Together, these factors account for the extraordinary levels of inequality that escapes the attention of the Washington-based multilateral institutions that regularly assess the country’s economic performance.” A similar pattern is identified in the Thai report: “Community self-reliance has decreased in rural areas, along with the loss of local resources that are the basic foundation of life and means of production. As agro-industry takes over, farmers are becoming paid labour or even contract labourers on their own land. Land resources are being excavated by mining and extractive industries by transnational corporations. People from rural areas form a large reserve body of labour, paid less than minimum wage, lacking job security, and easily replaced.”

The report continues: “Current Government development plans call for big projects to facilitate the provision of resources, fuel, energy and transportation to the industrial sector and urban areas. All of this will cause long-term degradation because of under-reproduction of labour and the environment. For labour, families do not have enough means and supports to nurture the next generation of skilled workers and knowledgeable citizens. Children are losing the ability to learn from their earliest years, therefore they have difficulties in improving their skills. With regard to the environment, extractive industry gains resources at the cost of environmental degradation and community conflict; agro-industry depletes the soil so rapidly that it cannot be restored fast enough. Small farmers reproduce a cycle of biophysical override (intensive use of chemical substances to maintain productivity) and new land clearance, leading to invasion of forest land.”

“Social relations on the path of development have become value relations,” concludes the report. “Civil-State (*Pracha-Rath*) policy ironically has built a shared agenda between Government and the industrial and corporate complex, enabling industrial and corporate interests to become the main drivers of development rather than the society and the citizen.”

In the Philippines, “the country’s economic geography illustrates highly uneven development and unequal distribution of wealth and income. Primate cities suck up most of the resources. Metro Manila, with neighbouring Central Luzon and Calabarzon, would claim from one-half to two-thirds of GDP. These regions are getting richer at the expense of regions like Bicol, Eastern Visayas, Cagayan Valley and, most especially, Mindanao. No wonder small savings deposited in faraway rural banks eventually end up in the vaults or ledgers of big banks in Metro Manila and are then lent to big borrowers who prefer to invest in already highly-developed areas.”

In Honduras, out of a total of 8 million inhabitants, 2.2 million are rural women. Two thirds of them suffer poverty and over one third live in extreme poverty due to lack access to land (only 12% have access) or to credit (only 11% receive it). Land is concentrated

in the hands of agriculture exporters while small farmers have less than two hectares to plough on average. It is not surprising that in a context of extreme inequalities Honduras also has the highest number of homicides in countries not at war, with 90 deaths for every 100 thousand inhabitants in 2014. That number fell to 68 in 2015, but this ‘success’ was mainly attributed to a new ruling that makes all records of deaths by the police confidential.

The United States is one of the most unequal countries among OECD member countries and while on the domestic front, economic growth seems to have recovered faster after the 2008 global crisis than it has in Europe, the Social Watch report warns that “95 percent of income growth since the recovery started has gone to the wealthiest 1 percent.”

Enduring disparities can be stronger when comparing across racial or gender lines. In 2013 the wealth gap between blacks and whites in the United States reached its highest point since 1989, while the wealth of white households was 13 times the median wealth of black households. Labour force participation has not increased among women in the core working age group since 2000, a situation in which the USA is alone among major advanced economies. The trend could be partially attributed to the lack of friendly policies for mothers.

Action on wage and employment policy should obviously be a key priority. There is some good news on this front: since apart from an executive order increasing the minimum wage for Federal contractors, there has been no increase in the national minimum wage. A regulation mandated in the financial reform bill passed in 2011 and challenged by the corporate sector, just entered into effect, forcing companies to disclose pay ratios between employers and workers.

While US federal fiscal policy has some progressive leanings, every state in the United States imposes higher effective tax rates on poor families than on the richest taxpayers. Some call this a strategy of pushing low-income families further into poverty and increasing the likelihood that they will need to rely on social protection programmes – which are

themselves chronically underfunded – the “soak the poor” strategy.

On the global stage, in order to live up to its responsibilities for reducing inequality among countries, the United States will definitely need to do a stronger redesign of its economic policies. The pattern of trade and investment treaties – of which the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) are the latest expressions – have supported concentration of profits among a conglomerate of US-based companies that dominate branding, marketing and intellectual property design in several value chains. Weak financial regulation that allowed the socialization of losses in times of crises, while increasing the privatization of benefits in times of boom, is also a key contributor.

### Violence and Conflict

Not surprisingly, ongoing conflicts are the main obstacle to sustainable development identified by civil society coalitions in Sudan, Palestine and in Afghanistan. In Sudan, the first priority in the report authored by Madani Abbas Madani and Niemat Kuku Mohamed is “Peace building, conflict resolution and transitional justice through the participation of women at the camps for internally displaced persons and women at grassroots levels in the wars affected areas.”

The Palestinian report, authored by the Social and Economic Policies Monitor (al Marsad) unequivocally states that “the occupation is the primary and absolute obstacle towards the achievement of any development or justice for the Palestinians.” Yet, Palestinian civil society is also critical of its own authorities: “On the other hand, the Palestinian Authority’s development policies still face structural problems, as they are built on the basis of growth and investment, and not on the basis of development and justice. The gender equality gap is still wide, due to laws and regulations restricting women’s ability to work outside the home. Justice in the collection of taxes and the distribution of services faces a fundamental flaw because it burdens the citizens and employees, yet favours prominent companies and investors.”

In Afghanistan, Abdul Sami Zhman from Cooperation for Peace and Development (CPD) explains that “peace and security” was added as a ninth goal to the eight MDGs “in order to recognize the critical role of peace and security in achieving the other MDGs.” Having lost over two decades to war, the government decided to modify the global timetable and benchmarks and 2020 was set for achieving its MDGs instead of 2015. In a country highly dependent on foreign assistance to deliver all of its social services, “this discrepancy between global and local timetables has created confusion and risks diverting the focus away from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”

Conflicts, on the other hand, are good business for some: “Since 2001, the export of weapons and military equipment from the Czech Republic has steadily increased, reaching a record value of US\$ 487 million in 2014,” estimates the Czech report. “In addition to the sales of old inventory from the Cold War, export growth also reflects the revival of the armaments industry since the 1990s. This growth in production and export of weapons is largely due to arming undemocratic and dictatorial countries.”

In Italy the report authored by Soana Tortora, Jason Nardi and Tommaso Rondinella denounces a three-fold increase in arms exports in 2015, “reaching a record of over 8.2 billion euros in sales since World War II – even to countries at war, despite national laws that explicitly forbid it.”

Hundreds of thousands of people are risking their lives every day to escape conflict and dictatorship. This movement of people is seen as a “refugee crisis” in Europe and has had an enormous, if less publicized impact on neighbouring countries. Jordan currently hosts more than 1.3 million Syrians and the Syrian refugees’ community has been reported to constitute fully 20 percent of the population living in Jordan, to the extent that in some areas in the North of the country, Jordanians now are a local minority. This imposes “severe stress on Jordan’s economy, host communities, fiscal position and public services” that have not been compensated by an adequate increase in the support of the international community. In the report on Lebanon, the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) concludes that “despite the lack

of accurate statistical data about the Syrian refugees in Lebanon some conclusions can be predicted: the negative impact on the environment, the high degree of uncertainty and its negative impact on investment, the brain drain, the degradation of the infrastructure, the political instability, the threat on the social cohesion and the mounting xenophobia and racism tendencies, the pressure on the labor market etc. These factors should be taken into consideration while planning and adopting a comprehensive and proper response to the crisis.”

The international community, state and non-state donors and implementing agencies are not meeting pledges undertaken at international conferences. According to ANND, this is because “they distrust the integrity and the ability of Lebanese institutions to manage the situation. The political crisis in Lebanon is harming its reputation as a democracy with effective accountability mechanisms. This reality is in fact the main argument used by the international actors to bypass the national system undermining the principle of national ownership. This in turn is causing a lack of coordination and policy coherence, waste of resources and energy, lack of transparency and a limited short term impact.”

Similarly, Svetlana Aslanyan, from the Center for the Development of Civil Society, the Social Watch partner in Armenia, reports that the ongoing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh “has created uncertainty and reluctance by the international community to invest in the country. Since independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, over 1 million people – almost a third of its population, have left the country, primarily in search of work.”

In the Dominican Republic, hundreds of thousands of migrants have arrived from neighbouring Haiti. After a lot of tension in recent years, Ruth Paniagua, from Fundación Étnica Integral reports for Social Watch that during 2014 and 2015 the Government instituted a process of immigrant regularization, benefiting 288,000 undocumented immigrants (about 3% of the total population), which will enable them to access basic services and work regularly, thereby helping to reduce the number of people in

poverty.” In proportion to the population, this would be the equivalent of Germany regularizing over 2 million refugees, which is double the effort – in a much poorer country – than that of the European country that is hosting by far the largest number of refugees.

### Who is in charge?

In their recommendations to the Mexican Government for the first year of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, civil society organizations are emphatic in their demand for participation in the discussion and design of the national implementation plan and the instruments and mechanisms for measuring, monitoring and review. They also stress that during the first year significant efforts should and can be devoted to ensure wide public dissemination and appropriation of the 2030 Agenda, which needs to be known by public servants at all levels, but also mean something to people, as expressed by the commitment to leave no one behind.

As civil society organizes to defend and promote the SDGs, frequently the first question is whom to address their views and demands. In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel has publicly adopted the 2030 Agenda as her agenda, thus requiring all ministries to align their programmes to the SDGs, and a discussion was started as to how to “translate” the international goals into German realities. But this is the exception, rather than the rule.

In Spain, Pablo Martínez Osés from Colectivo La Mundial, reports that support for the 2030 Agenda is restricted to the “shrinking space of development cooperation. Neither the Foreign Ministry nor any other governmental body has taken stands or implemented actions related to the challenges of the SDGs.” The Spanish Social Watch report argues that “to support a 2030 Agenda oriented towards transformation, equity and the transition to policies that promote fairness and sustainability would be incompatible with policies aimed solely at fiscal austerity and the promotion of exports.”

In Canada the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives reports that “the newly-elected federal Liberal

Government has committed to working towards achieving the goals set out in the 2030 agenda ‘both at home and abroad.’ However, this Government inherits a country that has been profoundly shaped by the conservative economic and social policies of the past decade. It will have to overcome the challenges posed by a much-diminished federal government, social and income inequality, and an economy based on growing wealth rather than wages in order to deliver on its commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.”

In Cyprus, public figures have been vocal about their commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the narrative put forth is that there is the political will to adopt them and make a real impact. In practice, however, the Department for the Environment of the Ministry of Agriculture has become the focal point for the SDGs. CARDET reports that “there is no task force to help with an interdepartmental coordination between ministries and jurisdictions, providing a coherent strategy for achieving the targets or even declaring if it would focus its efforts locally or internationally, make a consultation with the civil society (CSO) community or even put out a number of best practices for each ministry to follow as general principles. Furthermore, the same ministry (Agriculture) has shortly after the declarations took some hotly contested decisions about demarking part of national parks for tourism development, providing licenses for heavy industries in light industry areas close to communities, and assuming industry positions through the EU Trialogue process on conflictive mining legislation.”

Support to the 2030 Agenda is also prominent in Switzerland, where the Government officially declared it to be the “new universal reference framework” in terms of human well-being and sustainable economic development both internationally as well as domestically. However, in October 2015, three weeks after the approval of the 2030 Agenda, Switzerland announced important spending cuts, including a reduction of 115 million francs in the 2016 budget for international cooperation. “Savings are made at the cost of the poor and the country distances itself even more from the target of dedicating 0.7% of national income to development cooperation” comments Alliance Sud.

In Sudan “the lack of awareness on SDGs among policy-makers, CSOs and mass media will affect the citizen engagement negatively and the participation on policy making and decision taking is expected to be very minor.” Similarly, ANND reports that “Lebanon does not have a national strategy for development or a national economic plan or a poverty reduction strategy. Over the past 10 years, various Lebanese ministries have suggested sectorial policies supporting selected sustainable development goals with implementation plans. Planning and implementation of these policies lack comprehensive sectoral and geographical approaches. They are limited to some targeting interventions with a special focus on specific groups. It is also lacking of an inclusive, participatory mechanisms.”

In El Salvador, a National Council for Sustainable Development was created, composed of representatives from the Government, the United Nations, civil society and the private sector. Meanwhile in Jordan, the Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies wrote that “to date the Government has not taken any concrete step towards the promotion and realization of Sustainable Development Goals, and no specific unit, institution or ministry has been assigned to take charge of this process, indicating both a lack of institutional capacity as well as a lack of political will.”

In Egypt, the Egyptian Center for Economic & Social Rights reports that “the defining feature of the framework for Egypt’s national sustainable developmental strategy is the lack of a detailed roadmap to achieve several key goals, especially reducing poverty and unemployment and tackling the informal sector, for which it also lacks indicators. This is in addition to the lack of clarity in implementation mechanisms and the lack of consistency among the goals, despite the overarching strategy. The indicators used to measure the goals reflect the Government’s continuation of the neoliberal approach, which is contingent on the development of the private sector and dependent on it to finance the development goals. Thus, for example, to reduce the deficit, the strategy does not include raising taxes on companies, instead opting to tax consumers, such as with the 10 percent value added tax (VAT). The strategy also differs in important

ways from previous development strategies, none of which were discussed in Parliament or through any sort of social dialogue.”

In Belgium all levels of government, from the federal level to regional governments to local authorities, will be involved in setting up the national strategy for the SDGs. The Inter-Ministerial Conference for Sustainable Development (IMCSD) has the mandate to implement this strategy. The three regions and the federal government have each their own strategies and policy to advance sustainable development. “We cannot state nothing happened in Belgium,” reports 11.11.11 to the Social Watch network. “Nevertheless at this pace – the first half a year of implementing the SDG’s is already behind us – we can only dream of first steps of real implementation, meaning policy actions, in 2017. As civil society we are concerned about this slow pace. Belgium should have had a head start. Already in 1997, Parliament passed a law on the coordination of the federal policy on sustainable development. The law states that the federal government should set out a plan for sustainable development, taking into account the long-term vision and international commitments. The 2030 Agenda could easily be integrated into this action plan. The law also states that the plan should be ready within one year after the installation of a new parliament. This meant October 2015. A draft has been prepared by the Interdepartmental Commission on Sustainable Development (ICSD) but unfortunately it has been blocked for more than a year now.”

A benchmark to measure progress already exists in Italy: “In 2013, following a thorough participatory process, Italy has adopted a set of indicators for measuring equitable and sustainable well-being (BES).” The BES allows the analysis at the provincial and municipal levels and is now the basis for measuring national well-being in the academic world. However, the Government has not decided yet which body will be responsible for a sustainable development strategy and a national report, as requested by Agenda 2030.

In South Korea, the Citizens’ Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ) reports that “a Sustainable Development Committee (SDC) was established by presiden-

tial order in 2000, followed by passage of the Sustainable Development Act as a fundamental law in 2007. From 2000 to 2008, the SDC acted as a presidential advisory body, and the Government and national assembly worked together on strategies for sustainable development implementation. However, by 2010, the law had been downgraded, assigning the committee to the Ministry of Environment. Thereafter five-year sustainable development plans have been concentrated in the area of the environment, no longer covering the general state of the nation.”

In Nepal the institutions were ready and the country had already prepared a preliminary report on country-specific targets and indicators with a Vision 2030 blueprint when it faced in 2015 a devastating earthquake which not only reversed development gains but also added an additional financial burden of around US\$ 8 billion to which slightly over US\$ 4 billion is pledged by development partners. According to the report submitted by Nepal’s Rural Reconstruction Movement, the country “faces dual challenges of a robust leadership in terms of state restructuring through the implementation of the new constitution which will expedite local governance and effective people’s participation as well as a meaningful global partnership for development to achieve the SDGs and its graduation target by 2022.”

“Graduation” is the term used in development jargon to describe the moment when a country labelled as “least developed” is upgraded out of that category. There are currently 48 countries defined by the UN as LDCs. According to the civil society coalition LDC-Watch “LDCs are countries with special needs and vulnerabilities and hence require special attention in the implementation of the SDGs. LDCs are characterized not only by low income, weak human development and economic vulnerabilities but also by geographical and environmental constraints such as those of the Landlocked Developing Countries and the Small Island Developing States included in the category. LDCs are home to 30 percent of the global population living with hunger while deaths associated with climate-related disasters in the LDCs comprise 67 percent of the world total. Given the universality of the SDGs, the LDCs surely cannot be left behind. Both country leadership as well as ownership and global

partnership in delivery of means of implementation is key to achieving SDGs in the LDCs.”

The institutional problem is quite different in the Central African Republic, where the SDGs are seen as essentially another new bright idea of foreigners. “The SDGs were discussed while the country was in war,” reports Clotaire Rodonne Siribi, pastor and leader of the Groupe d’Action, de Paix et de Formation pour la Transformation. “There is no serious national appropriation of the goals. The country now has the SDGs, the Istanbul Plan of Action for the LDCs and the Agenda 2063 of the African Union. How can we synchronize these programmes in a national plan? If the Government and the international community are not rigorous in their actions, the Central African Republic will not meet any SDG, just as happened with the MDGs”.

In wrapping up the Social Watch report for Perú, Héctor Béjar made a summary that describes the state of the SDGs in many countries: “A growing economy with ups and downs, a decrease in monetary poverty but worsening multidimensional poverty, serious environmental problems, prosperity of the higher sector of the middle classes, concentration of wealth, many emerging economies arising from export agriculture, drug trafficking, human trafficking and arms smuggling and a political system full of corruption. Progress has been made in circulation of money and electronic and telephone connectivity, but there is a decline in quality of life and public safety. Corruption has invaded democracy. Crime is taking over streets and cities. Citizen organizations have multiplied, but they must face diverse forms of discrimination and repression. The road to achieving the 2030 Agenda is hazy and full of obstacles.”