

## **The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, a major turning point for Latin American policy making?**

*by Lina Dabbagh\**

After over two years of consultations and negotiations, with unprecedented participation of civil society, countries finalized the new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in New York in early August this year. This document, to be adopted by world leaders at a major summit in September, has the potential to become a turning point for national policy-making –if we do it right.

Following and expanding on the Millennium Development Goals, this new set of 17 global goals and 169 targets acts as a to-do list for the next 15 years to drive solutions to our biggest problems: poverty, injustice and climate change. For the first time, through this agenda there is acknowledgement that you can't deal with these crises in isolation.

Attention now turns to putting these goals – and the affordable, scalable solutions they contain – into action.

As a climate activist living in Latin America, the SDGs make me hopeful. The SDGs recognize that doing it right means adopting holistic policies that create a balance of the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. They must be the guiding star of any government intervention at all levels for the next 15 years.

This approach is the only sensible one. Climate change policies can positively influence the achievement of other goals that are important for society, such as food security, human health, energy access, energy security, employment and environmental services. We cannot solve poverty without solving climate change, each goal contains a check and balance to ensure that in the pursuit of development, we do not aggravate climate change.

In a region marked by political "*cortoplacismo*" (short sightedness) – the to-do list approach that the SDGs provide can help to guide policy making at all levels - national, regional and local – in line with a longer-term vision of fifteen years.

In most Latin American countries (except for Guatemala, Nicaragua and Uruguay), the president and most other government officials have a limit on the number of terms they may serve: usually one or two. In theory, this should bring fresh perspectives to government and ensure responsiveness to voter demands. In practice, term limits of sometimes only three years, as for instance in Mexican municipalities, leads to adoption of policies with no time for implementation at all, or implementation of policies that have strong visibility, but no real transformational power. Latin American politics lacks vision and persistence to deal with issues as environmental degradation or climate change.

Although Latin American countries have played an active role in the last couple of years by taking steps to reduce their pre-2020 emissions under the framework of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), most countries' climate change policies are not being implemented effectively, or are being undermined by other policies.

To be clear the imperative for climate action is not only based on Latin America's modest contribution to global carbon emissions. Rather, to set the region on a more sustainable and resilient development path. A focus on adaptation, increasing the deployment of renewable energy, implementation of sustainable transport systems, reducing fossil fuel subsidies, and protecting biodiversity is essential to the prosperity of all Latin Americans.

A positive example from Latin America is Colombia. Colombia has been very committed with the SDG process. A high-level interagency commission has already been created to establish a national mechanism to monitor the SDGs progress for the next 15 years, make recommendations on mechanisms for transparent accountability and reliable data production, and identify innovative financial measures required for the implementation of SDGs, among other responsibilities.

This September in New York, leaders have the opportunity to commit to the implementation of the full set of SDGs and to embrace the chance of a paradigm shift for the better.

Furthermore, leaders can set the tone for an ambitious agreement in December 2015 in Paris. Only by signing a robust, universal climate agreement in Paris, which signals the end of fossil fuel emissions by 2050, the sustainable development agenda can be achieved.

The signals coming out of New York and Paris will help set investment trends and policymaking decisions for the coming decades – leaders must be aware of the historic opportunity and the transformative power of both agendas.

Civil Society stands ready to support the development of effective national plans, indicators and measurement tools and to help communicate the vision to all levels of society.

Latin America is in a privileged position to set the world on a more sustainable pathway for the benefit of its citizens.

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