



THE 2030 AGENDA - HOW DO WE REACH THE GOALS?

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About the author

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Introduction

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals were adopted unanimously by the UN General Assembly in September 2015. The goals are supplemented by 169 targets.

All UN members have committed themselves to take measures to attain the goals. The responsibility for achieving them clearly lies with each individual country¹.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to an increased understanding of what measures are needed for the goals to be achieved. The focus is on the fundamental conditions and the political orientations that are required to this end. An important point of departure is the fact that some countries have been more successful than others in achieving the goals, and that countries that have been less successful can learn and benefit from the successes of others.

The “Sustainable Development Goals Index and Dashboards” were presented by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the Bertelsmann Stiftung in July 2016. The Index ranks 149 countries on a scale of 1-100, based on an assessment of the extent to which the goals have been achieved. The purpose of the Index is to provide guidance to individual governments on political priorities and measures that are necessary to reach the goals. The Index explicitly refers to the fact that it *“allows each country to compare itself with the region, with other counterparts at similar levels of economic development, and with the entire world, including the best and worst performers”*.

For each country, the ranking consists of a compilation of assessments of how the country performs in relation to each of the 17 goals. Consequently, a favourable outcome in one area can be offset by a poor performance in another. For instance, China has been extremely successful in reducing poverty (SDG 1), but is less successful in areas such as climate change (SDG 13) and protection of terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15). China ends up in 76th place among the 149 countries that have been assessed².

In an article in the Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter on 21 July 2016, the Swedish Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate and Deputy Prime Minister, Ms Isabella Lövin, and Jeffrey Sachs, the Head of SDSN, underline that the approach used in establishing the Index means a departure from a purely economic way of looking at things in favour of a more comprehensive view of development.

The Swedish Government has appointed a special Commission with the task of monitoring the implementation of the SDGs in Sweden. In a press release announcing the decision to appoint the Commission, it is noted that “the Agenda and the 17 goals are very much in line with the goals that have been established by Parliament in different policy areas”, and “that there are initiatives, action plans and strategies in several areas that can contribute to the attainment of the goals of the Agenda”.

The Government could have added that several of the goals have already been reached in Sweden. This is illustrated by the fact that Sweden ranks highest in the SDSN/Bertelsmann report, where it is noted that “Sweden is on average 84,5% of the way to the best possible outcome across the 17 SDGs”.

General

The fact that all countries have subscribed to the goals, and that they comprise several aspects of sustainable development, opens up a new way to approach issues related to development. The perspective is global in the sense that all countries have a responsibility to contribute to the attainment of the goals. One consequence of this is that the traditional distinction between developing and developed countries seems even more outdated.

As has already been noted, the Agenda and the SDSN/Bertelsmann ranking provide a basis for seeking guidance on how to reach the goals by comparing how different countries perform. This can be done by analysing how it is that some countries are more successful than others, and to identify the basic factors which lie behind growth, sustainable development, welfare and progress. These success factors are, in a general way, described in the introductory part of the Agenda, and more specifically in the action plan from Addis Ababa.

Thus, the Agenda paves the way for a comprehensive, evidence-based and modernized way of identifying what lies behind sustainable economic and social development, and an improved living standard for everyone. Consequently, the Agenda should be important for priorities, orientations and conditions in development cooperation. The fact that the results of many decades of development cooperation have not always turned out to be what was expected can at least partly be explained by circumstances and conditions in poor countries in areas that are dealt with in this paper.

The paper should be seen as a supplement to the report that was published in April 2016 by the “Analysis Group on Global Cooperation” appointed by the Swedish government. The focus of this report is on measures to strengthen international cooperation to reach the 17 goals, rather than on measures that must be taken by individual governments.

In an article in Dagens Nyheter on 17 August 2016, Professor Dani Rodrik

underlines that the problems of our time basically are domestic and that they cannot be resolved by international institutions. According to Rodrik, the global system should focus on global rules and procedures that enhance the quality of national political decisions. *“Global discipline concerning transparency, broad representation, accountability and the use of scientific and economic achievements in domestic processes are examples of such rules”*. Rodrik emphasizes that shortcomings in domestic decision-making processes have to be eliminated and that global institutions can provide only limited contributions in these respects. He goes as far as stating that global governance has become a “mantra” for the elites.

Fundamental factors behind progress and successes

In *“Civilization – the six killer apps of Western power”* (2011), **Niall Ferguson** has identified the six fundamental factors that he claims lie behind the progress that has been made in the west compared with all the countries in the rest of the world. These are:

- Competition
- Science
- Property
- Medicine
- Consumption, and
- Work.

In 2012, **Acemoglu and Robinson** published a study which is highly relevant in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. The title of the study is *“Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty”*. It is a well-documented and evidence-based analysis of what factors that lie behind nation’s successes and failures.

The main conclusion is that inclusive political and economic institutions underlie economic success. The importance of strong non-corrupt inclusive institutions is dealt with in more detail in a separate section of this paper.

In a study titled *“Development as Freedom”*, Nobel Prize Laureate **Amartya Sen** has highlighted the importance of political freedom and transparency for economic development. He has also emphasized the importance of what he refers to as *“freedom of opportunity”*.

Hernando de Soto’s thinking on the key importance of clearly set rules for ownership and property has had an important impact in many countries. The title of his main work is *“The Mystery of Capital: Why Capital Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else”*.

Bo Rothstein has made important contributions to understanding what is good governance, especially in the fields of institutions and corruption. The title of one of his main works is *“The Quality of Government: Corruption, Social Trust and Inequality in International Perspective”*.

Against this background, the following elements could be added to Niall Ferguson's list of success factors:

- Democracy and market economy
- Freedom for the individual, and human rights
- Efficient institutions and absence of corruption
- Trust
- Political understanding and political will.

Education and health should be added as key elements behind progress.

If countries score high on all these factors, prospects of reaching the SDGs are clearly favourable, as is evidenced by the ranking in the Bertelsmann/SDSN Index. The way countries are governed is obviously quite important. In this context, another factor could be mentioned – many hold the view that an important cause of Western progress is the separation of church and state and the creation of a civil society governed by secular laws.

An international environment that is conducive to sustainable development is another key prerequisite for the 17 goals to be achieved – absence of war and conflict, openness and free trade, free flow of information, a stable global financial system, and sound economic policies which generate sustainable and balanced growth.

In the Action Plan from Addis Ababa (para 20), countries have summarized some of the basic preconditions for sustainable development and prosperity:

“For all countries, public policies and the mobilization and effective use of domestic resources, underscored by the principle of national ownership, are central to our common pursuit of sustainable development, including achieving the sustainable development goals. Building on the considerable achievements in many countries since Monterrey, we remain committed to further strengthening the mobilization and effective use of domestic resources. We recognize that domestic resources are first and foremost generated by economic growth, supported by an enabling environment at all levels. Sound social, environmental and economic policies, including countercyclical fiscal policies, adequate fiscal space, good governance at all levels and democratic and transparent institutions responsive to the needs of the people are necessary to achieve our goals. We will strengthen our domestic enabling environments, including the rule of law, and combat corruption at all levels and in all its forms. Civil society, independent media, and other non-state actors also play an important role”.

This paragraph illustrates the fact that governments who support the Agenda understand the importance for societies to develop and for the SDGs to be achieved of the basic and evidence-based success factors listed in the paragraph. Obviously, they also form a part of the Agenda. However, it would have been desirable if measures in these areas could have been highlighted in the part of the decision covering the SDGs themselves.

Also, it would have been desirable if the Agenda could have emphasized the importance of enhanced understanding among governments of the challenges involved, and the importance of political will to take measures in accordance with the commitments that were made when the Agenda was adopted.

The world economy

Strong, balanced and sustainable economic growth (SDG 8) is a prerequisite for the possibilities to reach all the other goals. Growth generates resources which are needed if the goals are to be achieved. This is true not least for SDG 1 (end poverty in all its forms everywhere). This calls for sound economic policies in all countries, and appropriate macroeconomic policy coordination among the key players in the world economy.

A stable financial system is another prerequisite for reaching the goals. Measures must be taken to prevent financial crises like the one the world experienced in 2008. The 2008 crisis dealt a serious blow to efforts to promote sustainable development, not least in poor countries. The efforts that are being made to this end within the IMF, the G20 and the FSB (Financial Stability Board) are of particular importance.

This perspective is of fundamental importance. Regrettably, it is largely lacking in the Agenda. The observation has been made that there seems to be a long distance between the UN bureaucracy in New York and the Bretton Woods institutions in Washington.

The most important thing that rich countries can do to promote the development of poor countries is to achieve strong, sustainable and balanced growth. This has for a long time been the objective of the discussions within the G20. Growth means that markets are opened up for trade, that exports from poor countries can increase, and that resources are generated for investment, innovation, social programs, education and research and development.

The question of strong sustainable and balanced economic growth and financial stability has not been adequately reflected in the Agenda. The conclusions that have been arrived at in G20 in these fields should have been taken into account. For example, the importance of measures to promote growth, structural reforms, investment in infrastructure, and to enhance financial stability, could have been highlighted more clearly. Reference could have been made to the growth targets established within G20 and to the importance for all countries of pursuing sound and growth-oriented economic policies. It is in everyone's interest that the G20 reaches the growth targets that have been established – the group accounts for about 80% of world GNP.

The fact that G20 is not referred to in the Agenda may be explained by prevailing sensitivities within the UN – the G20 consists of a limited number of countries, and the UN is considered to be the only body that has legitimacy in these matters because it is universal.

The IMF and the World Bank play a major role in assisting poorer countries to make progress in the areas covered by the SDGs. In the IMF fact-sheet on the SDGs, it is underlined that development needs to be economically, socially and environmentally sustainable and that *“at the country level, governments should strive to create a sound macroeconomic environment and take action for strong and sustainable growth. Efforts should focus on building strong institutions to foster investor confidence, strengthening public finances, ensuring efficient and well-targeted public spending, investing in infrastructure, maintaining debt sustainability, deepening financial markets and access while safeguarding financial stability, and promoting inclusion and environmental sustainability”*.

In its report on “World Development Indicators”, the World Bank reports on progress towards the SDGs. For each of the 17 goals, key indicators have been selected to identify important trends and challenges and to elicit discussion on measurement issues.

In recent decades, a dramatic shift has taken place in how the world’s total GDP is distributed among countries. The share of the G7 has gone down and is now at the same level as it was in the beginning of the 19th century. At the same time, the share of a handful of developing countries have gone up rapidly – especially in China. These countries have understood how to benefit from the globalization that has taken place as a result of significantly lower transportation costs and the ICT revolution. They have pursued policies that attracts foreign investment and that encourages participation in global value chains³.

The economic growth that has taken place in these countries has led to dramatic reduction in poverty rates (SDG1). This is of fundamental importance. But clearly much remains to be done in these countries in order to reach all the other SDGs.

Regrettably, the benefits of globalization have only spread to a limited number of developing countries. For the rest, it seems important to adopt the same kind of policies that the successful ones have adopted in order to obtain the same results. The ICT-revolution will make this much easier.

Peace and security

The most important task of the UN is to promote and maintain peace and security.

In the newspaper article published last July and quoted above, the Swedish Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate and Jeffrey Sachs note that *“war today is perhaps the most important obstacle to sustainable development ... the ongoing wars in the Middle East not only undermine in a dramatic way sustainable development in the countries involved in the conflicts but also threaten the global efforts for sustainable development”*.

Against this background, one could have hoped that a specific goal about peace and security, and the removal and prevention of war between nations and internal violent conflicts, could have been included among the sustainable development goals. SDG 16 refers only to a commitment to “**promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions**”.

It is not known if any attempts were made to include something about a deadline for the elimination of conflicts during the preparations of the Agenda. This idea is of course completely unrealistic but it still would have been appropriate to include a specific reference to the importance of peace and security for the possibilities to reach the goals.

SDG2 refers to ending hunger and improving food security. Famine and malnutrition exist primarily in the wake of armed conflicts, not least in failed states.

In her speech to the Security Council on 10 January, Foreign **Minister Wallström** noted that “*2016 exposed the urgent need for a global recommitment to multilateral solutions to conflict and to collaborative security, specifically to the prevention of conflict*”. She underlined the importance of addressing the root causes of conflict and noted that the Sustaining Peace agenda, together with the Sustainable Development Goals, provide the platform and the master plan. She proposed that conflict prevention should be made a priority for the whole UN system.

This is an area where the UN could make a direct contribution to reaching the SDGs.

Democracy

Standard of living is generally higher in democracies than in non-democracies. In the SDSN/Bertelsmann ranking of how countries achieve the goals, all the top 45 countries are democracies except Belarus.

As a rule, there is a strong correlation between the way countries are governed and the well-being of their citizens. In autocracies people are poorer, as are prospects for development. The situation can be illustrated by a comparison between Norway, which is on the top of Economist’s democracy index, and North Korea, which is at the bottom.

There are of course many reasons that explain the differences in standard of living between different countries. But there are many reasons to assume that the basic features of liberal democracies - accountability, general elections, transparency, freedom for the individual, rule of law, protection of property – are important elements that underlie a country’s prospects for growth and prosperity. The fact that citizens in liberal democracies generally have trust in public authorities and in their neighbours is also a very important part of the explanation. This seems to have been recognized in the paragraph in the Addis Ababa Action Plan quoted above.

No country can build wealth without providing individuals with skills and incentives to work and invest, and without creating general conditions that are favourable in these respects. "Poverty is what you have until you create wealth".⁴ Consequently, in assessing a country's performance in relation to the 17 goals and to the prospects of reaching them, the way in which a country is governed should be taken into account more explicitly.

Democracy is not just a question of human rights and fundamental freedoms, it is also a question of economic development and achieving sustainable societies. Authoritarian leaders tend to have other priorities than sustainability. It is not a question of 'imposing' a western system on the rest of the world in order to gain influence, as is proclaimed by some. It is a question of promoting a system that has proven to be the most effective one in generating growth and prosperity – and in creating conditions where sustainable development can be achieved.

This is a perspective that should be given weight in the follow-up of the 2030 Agenda.

There are numerous examples of how authoritarian states end up in prolonged economic stagnation, and where economic development is not sustained because of heavy reliance on extractive industries. Leaders in such countries often lack the political will to take measures in a democratic direction, especially measures that would ensure transparency and accountability. Such measures would make it more difficult for leaders in these countries to retain power and privileges, and to enrich themselves. The impact of policies pursued by authoritarian leaders is to worsen the prospects for development and the attainment of the SDGs. Authoritarian misrule is also the main cause for humanitarian crisis.

None of the 17 SDGs refers to democracy as the best form of governance if the objective is to achieve welfare and sustainable development. And the idea of setting a target date when all countries in the world should become liberal democracies is unfortunately quite unrealistic. This is particularly true in a situation where many governments actively resist democratic ideals and combat popular movements which call for freedom and human dignity. These countries also actively oppose international efforts to promote democratic principles and human rights, referring to the long-standing UN principle of national sovereignty and non-interference.

There is a reference to democracy in the introductory part of the Agenda.

Paragraph 9 reads as follows: *"we envisage a world ... in which democracy, good governance and the rule of law, as well as an enabling environment at the national and international levels, are essential for sustainable development, including sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development, environment protection and the eradication of poverty and hunger"*.

As is illustrated in the Bertelsmann/SDSN Index, countries with a liberal democratic system have been more successful in reaching the goals than countries

with authoritarian systems. This, again, illustrates the fact that the way countries are governed should be taken into account when progress made in achieving the goals is assessed, and that liberal democracies should set the standard. This is particularly important in a situation where liberal democracies are under threat as perhaps never before⁵.

In its 2017 report, Freedom House notes that 2016 represents the 11th consecutive year of decline in global freedom. According to the report, out of the 195 countries assessed, 49 were categorized as 'not free', corresponding to 25 percent of the world's population. It notes that populist and nationalist forces have made significant gains in democratic states, and that, in 2016, a decline in political rights and civil liberties took place in 67 states.

These developments give rise to serious concern, from the point of view of the prospects of reaching the goals established in Agenda 2030.

Human rights

None of the 17 goals deals specifically with human rights, in spite of the fact that there is a clear correlation between respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms on the one hand, and the possibilities for a society to reach the sustainable development goals on the other. However, several references are made to human rights in the introductory part of the Agenda. Already in the preamble, it is stated that *"they /the 17 goals/ seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls"*.

Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been generally accepted it would have been desirable if a firm commitment to respect for instance Art. 19 of the Declaration had been included among the SDGs (*"everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression: this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers"*).

Article 19 is highly relevant in today's world because freedom for the individual is more threatened now than it has been for a long time.

Theoretically, one could imagine an SDG where states agree that all political prisoners in the world should be released at a certain point in time, with reference to the Universal Declaration.

In the introductory section of the decision on Agenda, there is a fairly strongly worded paragraph which deals with human rights (paragraph 8): *"we envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination, of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity, and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity."*

In paragraph 19, it is stated that *“we reaffirm the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as other international instruments relating to human rights and international law. We emphasize the responsibilities of all States, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations, to respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind as to race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status”*.

This language amounts to a recognition of the fact that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is important if a country wants to reach the SDGs. Freedom of the individual, and freedom of access to information, are prerequisites for progress in research and development and innovation. Countries where human rights are respected are richer, more prosperous and more stable than countries where human rights are suppressed, for political or religious reasons. Those countries do not benefit from the creativity and driving forces of the individual (cf. Amartya Sen in “Development as Freedom”).

Clearly, the question of human rights has an important economic dimension, in addition to the moral and ethical one.

One of Niall Fergusons success factors is **“science”**. The reason is obvious - if freedom of thought and freedom of expression are restricted, a country’s achievements in the fields of research and development and innovation are hampered.

Scientific achievements originating in the west lie behind much of the enormous progress that the world has witnessed during the last 100 years or so. Without western science, it will not be possible to reach the SDGs. This is very obvious in such fields as agriculture, nutrition, sanitation, energy, water and medicine, not least when it comes to a continued effort to eradicate infectious diseases.

In the introduction to Bernard Lewis’ often quoted article from 2002 (“What went wrong”) about the decline and stagnation in Muslim countries, it is noted that *“underlying much of the Muslim worlds travail may be a simple lack of freedom”*. When authoritarian leaders restrict freedom for political reasons – because they are scared of losing their positions and power – they also hamper economic development and growth. This is certainly also true in countries that prevent freedom of research and freedom of thought and expression for religious reasons.

In addition, strife and conflicts are often caused by repression of human rights.

Corruption

Corruption is an important obstacle to development. There is a clear correlation between the prevalence of corruption in a given country and its level of development.

This fact emerges clearly if you compare the country ranking in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index with the ranking in the **Human Development Index** of the UNDP. Countries with low levels of corruption tend to be more prosperous than countries with a high level. Experience shows that countries that quickly (and often through radical measures) manage to eliminate corruption also enjoy a rapid economic development (for example Singapore).

Corruption hampers economic growth (SDG 8). If corruption is endemic, which is the case in many countries, all the SDGs are affected. Corruption undermines trust and increases injustice. Competition is distorted and resources are wasted.

There are numerous examples of political leaders who, through corrupt behavior and outright theft, enrich themselves at the expense of their populations. This is particularly true in authoritarian countries which are heavily dependent on natural resources. Corruption flourishes in countries where there is a strong link between money and power.

The importance of corruption as an obstacle to development has often been underestimated. In Agenda 2030, there is no reference to corruption in any of the goals. There is, however, one reference in one of the targets under SDG 16, which among other things deals with promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies. The target reads simply ("*substantially reduce corruption and bribery*").

The Addis Ababa Action Plan is more detailed as far as corruption is concerned. Paragraph 25 reads as follows: "*We urge all countries that have not yet done so to ratify and accede to the United Nations Convention against Corruption and encourage parties to review its implementation⁶. We commit to making the Convention an effective instrument to deter, detect, prevent and counter corruption and bribery, prosecute those involved in corruption activities, and recover and return stolen assets to their country of origin. We encourage the international community to develop good practices on asset return. We support the Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative of the United Nations and the World Bank, and other international initiatives that support the recovery of stolen assets*".

Effective institutions

Effective and functioning institutions staffed with professional and non-corrupt civil servants are an essential element in a well-functioning society. Inclusiveness means that the institutions are independent and democratically controlled by the people and not by a ruling elite.

Governments have an important responsibility to ensure that recruitment of civil servants to public institutions is based on professional merit, competence and a high ethical standard, and that nepotism and cronyism is avoided.

Inclusive institutions are important for the establishment of the trust that is necessary for the development in all societies. Trust is higher in countries

where governments deliver the kind of results that people are looking for. Trust develops when people think that they can rely on public institutions to be fair, impartial, non-corrupt and efficient, when they sense that the institutions serve the interest of the people, and that their decisions are based on the rule of law. Trust in the judicial system is particularly important.

The main message in “Why Nations Fail” is that developed countries are wealthy because they have established inclusive economic and political institutions that create incentives for work, investment and innovation. Similar conclusions have been arrived at in the work carried out at the Quality of Government Institute at the University of Göteborg. The main message in Hernando de Soto’s work is the importance of public institutions that keeps a record of land and property ownership.

Absence of such inclusive institutions is a common characteristic in failed states.

The importance of effective institutions and of a professional and dedicated civil service has been underestimated in Agenda 2030. The matter has been included in SDG 16, which also includes other issues: *“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”*.

It would have been desirable if a separate goal on the importance of effective institutions had been included in the Agenda. Such a goal could have been supplemented with a specific target on criteria for recruitment of officials for such institutions.

Several references are made in the Agenda to “good governance”. An effective public administration, rule of law, and absence of corruption are key elements in that concept.

Competition, openness and free trade

According to Ferguson, competition is one of the factors that lie behind the successes of the western world. It is thanks to competition and free trade that enormous progress has been made in recent decades in the reduction of poverty.

The key to Asia’s development has been its integration in the world economy. In 1981, almost nine out of ten Chinese lived in extreme poverty compared to only one in ten today⁷.

Just as an example – according to an estimate made within the University of Groningen, foreign demand for Chinese products led to the creation of 70 million jobs during the 5-year period that followed China’s accession to the WTO in 2001. According to a study made at the Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada, textile exports from Vietnam to the United States increased by 277 percent in the three years that followed US dismantling of trade restriction in 2001, and about

7 million Vietnamese were lifted out of poverty.

These figures should be borne in mind in the present situation, where protectionism is on the rise and when the benefits of globalization are being questioned.

Regrettably, none of the SDGs deals specifically with free trade. However, under SDG 17 (*“Strengthening the means of implementation...”*) there is a target (*“Promote a universal rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization, including through the conclusion of negotiations under its Doha Development Agenda”*).

It would have been desirable if the Agenda had included stronger language on the importance of resisting protectionism and on support for globalization. Free trade and open markets are essential for sustainable development. Language on the importance of resisting protectionism could have been added, for instance by quoting declarations from meetings of the G20 (before Trump).

Education and literacy

Literacy and skills are prerequisites for progress in all areas covered by the SDGs, and for political freedom.

Progress in literacy has followed economic developments quite closely. The global literacy rate has increased from around twenty-one percent in 1900 to around 86 percent in 2015.

In certain countries, opposition to education for girls is still widespread. However, significant progress has been made in the last few decades. The global ratio of female literacy to male literacy increased from fifty-nine percent to ninety-one percent between 1970 and 2010⁸.

The importance of education has been recognized in SDG 4 (*“ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all”*). The importance of gender equality has been recognized in SDG5 (*“achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”*).

Follow-up and review

The decision on Agenda 2030 has energized the whole UN system, the Bretton Woods institutions and NGOs world-wide. All UN agencies and bodies have undertaken programs and activities that aim at making contributions to reaching the goals. These programs support and assist efforts made by individual governments – as had already been noted, the Agenda rightly puts to responsibility for achieving the goals on Member States governments.

It should be noted, however, that the review process shall *“take into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities”*. This ‘opt-out clause’ means, for example, that Saudi Arabia

can abstain from taking any measures to comply with SDG 5 (*“achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”*).

It seems that the role played by UN specialized agencies and Bretton Woods institutions have not been properly recognized in the section of the Agenda that deals with follow up and review.

In this section,

- all countries are encouraged to “develop as soon as practicable ambitious national responses to the overall implementation of this Agenda (Voluntary National Reviews, VNRs). Reports shall be submitted to the UN secretariat and discussed at meetings with the High Level Political Forum. Prior to the July 2016 meeting of the High Level Forum, 22 countries had submitted VNRs. 44 countries have submitted VNRs to the July 2017 meeting of the Forum.
- The High Level Forum is supposed to have a *“central role in overseeing a network of follow-up and review processes”*. More specifically, the task is to *“track progress in implementing the Universal Goals and targets,” and to “identify achievements, challenges, gaps and critical success factors and support countries in making informed policy choices”*. In addition, the Forum shall *“facilitate sharing of experiences including successes, challenges and lessons learned, and provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for follow-up. It will provide system-wide coherence and coordination of sustainable development policies”*.
- Doubts have been expressed whether it is possible for the Forum to carry out an effective and meaningful review in accordance with these guidelines. It is simply too much, even if each annual meeting will not review progress made in all the goals. The idea of *“identifying achievements”* etc and *“facilitate sharing of experience”* during these meetings illustrates an unfortunate inclination to centralize follow up to New York.
- One alternative could have been to put the responsibility for follow up of individual SDGs wholly on the specialized agency responsible for that specific goal. The obvious choice would have been to explicitly ask UNESCO to monitor the implementation of SDG 4 (education) and SDG 14 (oceans) through the International Oceanographic Commission; and the FAO to take care of SDG 2 (hunger and food security). UNESCO has already, through the Incheon Declaration, adopted at the World Education Forum in May 2015, been entrusted to lead and coordinate ‘Education 2030’ through guidance and technical support, within the overall SDG agenda.

Several SDGs could have been allocated to other UN agencies and also to the Bretton Woods institutions. Why this has not been done is difficult to understand. Also, it would have been quite rational to ask the IEA (International

Energy Agency) to monitor the implementation of SDG 7 (energy). While this is probably unrealistic, there is no organization that can match the IEA when it comes to international energy issues, and the Agency has in recent years given high priority to the energy situation in emerging economies and poor countries.

- The working method that is envisaged seems to be similar to the one that is successfully employed by the OECD, where a limited number of fairly similar member countries meet to exchange experience about sound policies, and where so called 'best practices' are developed. There are strong doubts whether this model could be used at the global level.
- The wish to centralize follow-up and review in New York is illustrated also by the decision to establish a "Technology Facilitation Mechanism" whose task is to "support the Sustainable Development Goals". The mechanism shall be "based on a multi-stakeholder collaboration between Member States, civil society, the private sector, the scientific community, United Nations entities and other stakeholders and will be composed of a United Nations inter-agency task team on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals, a collaborative multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals and an online platform".

In today's world, the idea to place such a "Technology Facilitation Mechanism" in New York is bizarre, to put it mildly. Today, thanks to the ITC-revolution, everything is available to everyone through the Internet. It is difficult to envisage that the outcome of this arrangement will be of any benefit to anyone.

Conclusions

- The chapter in the Agenda on review and follow-up should be reconsidered at the earliest convenience. The main deficiency is that it centralizes follow-up activities in New York, which makes the whole process much less effective;
- The Agenda underlines that the primary responsibility for implementation lies with the individual countries. It is important that the Agenda stresses the need for mobilization and effective use of domestic resources in all countries. International organizations have an important role in providing advice and support to this end, especially to the poor countries that have a long way to go to reach the 17 goals;
- The IMF and the World Bank have a special role to play in this regard, considering the dialogue that is taking place between the two and all member states, and the knowledge and expertise in both institutions on the economic and social situation worldwide;
- Against this background, the possibility of encouraging the IMF and the World Bank to strengthen the dialogue with member states should be

examined. They could, for example, provide sound policy advice on what measures that should be taken to implement the Agenda. The two institutions could also prepare a joint assessment for each member state on its performance in relation to all the 17 goals, taking into account the work done by SDSN and Bertelsmann Stiftung, and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data;

Joint country reports from the IMF and the World Bank should also include assessments on where a country stands in relation to all the 'success factors' that have been referred to in this paper, including democracy, freedom and human rights. Such reports, together with the VNRs, would constitute a useful input to the High Level Forum in its work to oversee the implementation of the Agenda, and they would also serve the purpose of providing incentives for countries to live up to their commitments;

- The role played by the OECD in preparing the Agenda and in participating in its follow-up should be recognized. The OECD possesses considerable knowledge and experience in all the areas covered by the SDGs. The organization has produced a report titled "Better Policies for 2030 – an OECD Action plan on the Sustainable Development Goals". A number of studies have been published covering many of the SDGs, for instance dealing with green economy, gender equality, SDGs in development cooperation, oceans and bioeconomy;
- The importance of the 'success factors' listed in this paper should be strongly underlined by the Swedish government at the meetings of the High Level Forum.

REFERENCES

¹ Obviously, some of the goals can only be reached in international cooperation - SDG13 (climate change), SDG14 (oceans) and target 3.3 (infectious diseases).

² In the Environmental Performance Index, published by Yale University, China ranks 106 out of 180 countries. Finland, Iceland and Sweden are on the top of the list.

³ Baldwin, "The Great Convergence", 2016

⁴ Norberg, Progress 2016 p. 63

⁵ In a recent newspaper article (Dagens Nyheter 21 May), prof. Rothstein has asserted that "It is quite clear that, of all the social models that have been tried since the beginning of industrialization, research can now nominate a winner when it comes to establishing good living conditions, and that is to a large extent the Nordic Model that Macron now has made his own".

⁶ 178 countries and international organizations have actually ratified the Convention. Chad, Somalia and North Korea have not.

⁷ Norberg 2016 "Progress" p. 71

⁸ Norberg, "Progress" 2016 p. 129

