



The National Alliance of Women's Organisations' report:

Sustainable Development Goals: European Indicators

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Sustainable Development Goals: European Indicators

The National Alliance of Women's Organizations (NAWO) organised an event on the 28th January 2016: 'Sustainable Development Goals: European Indicators'. It was hosted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and sponsored by Roberta Blackman-Woods. The event explored the position of gender equality in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and plans for their implementation including the necessary indicators in order to measure success. It also provided an opportunity for further collaboration on the SDGs and development of the indicators both in the UK and the EU with special focus on Goal 5, Gender Equality, and gender sensitive elements in the other goals.

We were joined by a distinguished panel of speakers: Pat Black, International Director of Advocacy for Soroptimist International, Kate Horstead Policy and Influencing Officer at Age International and Marianne Haslegrave, the Director of the Commonwealth Medical Trust. Zarin Hainsworth, chair of NAWO, chaired the event.



Zarin opened the event and said that to ensure implementation of the SDGs it is important that we must use smart indicators and we need all need ensure we are fully conversant with the SDGs and the indicators and are involved in the process.

Pat Black, who speaks on all matters related to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), gave a thorough overview of the SDGs. She emphasized that they were the result of global consultation over three years and replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The consultation process was designed to involve as many people as possible, but especially young people through the use of social media. This highlighted the great strength and importance of the role of civil society in member states. While these consultations identified more than 17 themes, government conversations narrowed them down to what could be achieved by 2030. Every member state has signed up to implementation of the goals.

Although the SDGs match the MDGs in their foci they have a much broader vision. The push for more goals than the MDGs was partly to ensure more areas of interest, particularly related to the environment, were incorporated. Furthermore, the measurement of the SDGs has become more focused and specific with each goal having its own target.

The United Nations (UN) through its many agencies such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other global organisations such as IMF are being identified to take the lead in collecting data and monitoring outcomes for the indicators of the SDGs. The challenge now is how to lobby governments to act and implement the goals. Pat said it was unclear at this time what the monitoring process will be and that it is slightly ambiguous as to how the SDGs will be achieved by the target date of 2030. We need to develop a system to monitor progress, but how is this to be achieved?

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Pat identified the creation of clear and comprehensive indicators as of vital importance in achieving the SDGs. Particularly as the responsibility of data collection will continue to be a difficult problem in some member states. Indicators are to be agreed at the end of March. Pat ended by proposing that other agencies can possibly be utilised as further monitors. For example, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) can oversee and measure the implementation of goals involving women and girls. However, how we ensure the collection and availability of data, remains a challenge to be overcome.

Zarin followed by saying that an SDG Watch has been set up in Europe. They have already held some meetings in order to assess the Goals. However, Europe is still not adequately organised in how to address and monitor the SDGs. For example, all the goals have elements relating to women, yet the monitoring of them in the UK is being segregated into national government departments. Furthermore, NGOs around the world have come up with some indicators to call governments to account. Yet, not much work has been done by NGOs across Europe. She explained that questionnaires had been sent to United States and Europe to ascertain what resources and structures are already in place for data collection in support of monitoring progress around implementation of the SDGs. The questionnaires were due back on 5 February 2016 however, at the time of this event not many responses had been received. There is a changing global structure and it is our responsibility to ensure nobody is left behind. The indicators must speak to the circumstances of each country and every country should be encouraged to create their own specific indicators.



Kate Horstead is working to tackle the multiple inequalities experienced by women in later life, and ensuring that women and men of all ages are included in the UK's international development policies and strategies. Age International is the UK affiliate of the HelpAge network and it has also been working to advocate for women of all ages as part of the Gender and Development Network.

Kate acknowledged that the SDGs are a big step forward and have the potential to reshape the approach to development in their ambition to 'Leave no-one behind'. She praised the language of the SDGs as being much stronger than that of the MDGs, which failed to take older people into account. SDGs have opened a dialogue between civil society and governments and there is the potential to further engage civil society in their implementation.

However, she said that the SDGs can only be achieved if the indicators are as inclusive as the goals themselves. She highlighted that many indicators originally had an upper age limit. For example, the indicators in Goal 5.2: eliminating violence against women and girls – had a cap at 49 years of age for measuring progress. Yet, there is no evidence to suggest that violence stops after this age bracket. Kate said we must continue to advocate to resolve any such injustices. The SDGs do specifically reference older adults, but Kate asserted that we must influence the

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indicators to ensure that older women and men are counted during the application of the SDGs. There have been several rounds of consultation which both the HelpAge network and the GADN have fed into. We have also been trying to influence the individual members of the Inter-Agency Expert Group (IAEG) on SDGs. The recent report of the IAEG has now proposed removing the age caps on Goal 3.4, reducing premature mortality from non-communicable diseases, and Goal 5.2. It has other positive ideas, but despite support from many member states, changes have not yet been implemented and the discussions are ongoing. Concerns also remain about indicator Goal 5.6, ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.



Kate stated that it is our responsibility as civil society to stay involved in the process. In order to be active civil society must continue to hold the UK government to account to support favourable proposals on indicators and to honour its commitment to develop data collection resources. One way of doing this is by working with MPs and to keep asking questions. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) is looking at whether the internationally recognised Demographic Health Surveys which have been used to measure violence against women, can be expanded to

collect data for those over 49 years of age who have until now been excluded. In addition to a focus on age, they are also focusing on improving data disaggregated by gender, disability and location, and they have asked for civil society's support for and expertise in this process. DFID has worked closely with many NGOs throughout the SDGs process and it is important that this continues. Kate shared a story of the abuse women suffer when accused of being witches in some parts of the world, as a result of intersecting gender and age-based inequalities, and concluded this story with the understanding that not all acts of violence are culturally understood as violence. There is, therefore, a need for violence to be properly defined and recognised by governments and civilians in every member state and for data to be collected. Clear and specific indicators will help to ensure women of all ages are protected and supported.

An event attendee, Margaret Owen, the Director of Widows for Peace through Democracy, commented that widows are often left out of the dialogue regarding the wellbeing of older adults in the SDGs and indicators.

Marianne Haslegrove too acknowledged that MDGs indicators had not been closely monitored. It is to rectify this weakness that the Statistical Commission and NGOs agreed upon indicators for SDGs. Governments from the outset have had control of the development of the SDGs. They also have control over the indicators and not the UN. The Statistical Commission at its March meeting will have

before it the report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals



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(IAEG-SDGs) which will contain the proposed indicators that have been agreed. There is at least one indicator per target. There will also be an addendum or working paper with their recommendations for those indicators that are marked with an asterisk (*) in the report, signifying their need to be specified at country or sub-national level.

Some NGOs are in disagreement with these indicators. Indeed, these indicators are global and so are not very ambitious. Marianne identified a problem with connecting experts' knowledge to political actions. Policies need to be evidence based. For example, the UN Economic Commission for Europe is helping in implementing the SDGs however, their remit is only on economic issues and not social or environmental. Therefore, we must start pushing for implementation, but also demand review and follow up. Marianne noted that, if done correctly, indicators will allow for the accurate collection of data.

Marianne's main point was that the SDGs are a universal agenda and everyone should be included. SDGs are created to leave no one behind. Therefore, we need plan for implementation but also we need to ensure that civil society is strong. For example, some countries lag behind in reproductive rights and so civil society must push for all nation states to recognise them. The identification of experts will add to the strength of civil society.

The Secretary General's report suggests the process will be reviewed every four years by the High-Level Political Forum during which governments can choose to state their commitments. We are in need of a universal agenda for clarity of process and implementation. In the UK the Government Equalities Office (GEO) will be monitoring and implementing Goal 5 (Gender), but other goals will be the responsibility of other government departments.

To do better we need regional indicators and strong European indicators. The Secretary General's report shows the role that regional commissions can play. On a national level there is some willingness but not all data required is being collected. We need to identify experts who can help develop the indicators over time. The global indicators will develop over the years so those we have in 2030 could be different to those we have now. Marianne ended by stating that creating the SDGs was the easy part of the process, implementation will be much more difficult.

Following the presentation there was enthusiastic discussion and sharing of information and ideas Anne Peters, Policy Office at DFID, acknowledged that it was important to know where the current knowledge gaps are. Currently there are 229 indicators. We need to think about statistical capacity and data gaps and caps. She expressed an interest in building on a cross-governmental approach by integrating resources over a variety of government departments and agencies.



Another participant highlighted the importance of having qualitative indicators as well as

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quantitative indicators. It was considered that data could possibly be collected through a collaboration of experts in equality and diversity forums. There needed to be discussions at the national level. She questioned whether there was any funding available for people to develop such frameworks? It is suggested that qualitative data exists, but we need the resources to analyse the data and to challenge the validity of new data being collected. The need to train people to analyse the components of qualitative research and its validity was essential. There was a general agreement in the room about the value of qualitative data and that statistics may present a different picture in reality to information collected qualitatively.

Another participant highlighted that the UN and some governments are well known for providing lots, an overabundance in some cases, of technical information. However, standards are often set too low. Therefore, governments should be held to account by people at the grassroots level to improve these standards. We need to identify how to increase standards and make them easier to understand.

Marianne responded by saying that there are some indicators that have not been agreed upon in the IAEG report. These disagreements may possibly be due to the suggested data type. She suggests those in the UK to write to the Office of National Statistics and the Government Statistical Services about how is best to measure the success of the gender equality Goal and other gender agendas. Glenn Everett is willing to meet with groups, however we must first ensure we have a good understanding of the process.

Kate added that the DFID are discussing how to make data more accessible and how grassroots organisations can use the data to participate in the negotiation of indicators in different forums.

Zarin said that it is useful to work with academics to come up with local indicators. She referred to the Equality and Human Rights Commissions' report, 'Is Britain Fairer', and highlighted the need for grass roots data.



We require base level statistics from a local level. The best way would be to collect data from a grassroots level through the use of a clear data collection template, which would ensure objectivity.

The audience believed there must be public engagement in data collection. For example, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is asking for grassroots data. However, they face a problem in that all the data received needs to be correlated. Other agencies are also planning events with civil society about data.

Zarin discussed the extent to which businesses have been involved in the discussion on indicators. The DFID is now making new partnerships with the private sector with a big focus on youth engagement. This

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leads us to question if the private sector as well as civil society should work together in discussion on indicators. Zarin asserted that it is important to have mixed perspectives around the table. Businesses and NGOs have a different idea of data accessibility so keeping these two spheres together is a good way to ensure they are both regulating each other. She added that there is a need to nurture inclusive working relationships in conferences because it is important to continue to work together as a critical friend with everyone, including businesses. The process of engagement is the strength that sets SDGs apart and we must pursue it.

The question - who will be involved in the High-level Political Forum at the end of the 4th year was asked. Marianne responded that two parts of IAEG feed into an annual report. Global data then feeds into the Secretary General report. There will also be a scientific report. The High level Political Forum meets under ECOSOC and every four years they will meet under the General Assembly for a full review of implementation. Countries will report twice during the 15-year process, by minister or high level civil servant. There will be a different theme each linked to specific goals. The 2016 theme is “Leave No One Behind” and the 2019 theme will look more at Goal 5, Gender Equality. The reviews will look at achievements, lessons learnt and obstacles faced. At the national level the DFID will use the reports to analyse domestic trends.

Speakers concluded and summarised by saying that much work has taken place to create a good set of goals and targets for the SDGs. Now civil society needs to play a large part in ensuring their implementation. The next step in implementation is the creation of robust indicators at national level. Participants voiced thanks for the event and the range of information that had been shared.

On behalf of NAWO we would like to thank everyone involved in the preparation and delivery of this event, especially Roberta Blackman-Woods and the IPU.

