



Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Major Group Official Position Paper for the 2017 High-Level Political Forum

Summary

The 2017 High Level Political Forum addresses the theme “Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world,” an imperative that is also a prerequisite for sustainable peace. Achieving these aims will not be possible unless the structural and systemic barriers to achievement - and root causes of exploitation and degradation of the environment - are addressed. Current neoliberal macroeconomic policy is a major driver of unequal distribution of wealth and power and the destruction of natural resources, and must be reconsidered and replaced. Notions of development based entirely on economic growth present a myopic view of progress and must be discarded, and corporations must be held to account for their social and environmental records. We call for a new development paradigm which furthers the well-being of humans, nature and animals, and which sees as its ultimate aim the achievement of equity and justice, to “leave no one behind.”

The practical contributions of civil society are a distinct and important element of this process. The NGO Major Group therefore calls on the United Nations and its Member States to increase the engagement of civil society, by soliciting more extensive inputs from Major Groups and other Stakeholders, and providing their translation into the six UN languages. Allowing ample time for meaningful engagement of civil society in SDG implementation and review processes is essential at global, regional and national levels.

Each country is responsible for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in consultation with its people, to address collective challenges from a place of shared endeavour. From individuals to local authorities to national ministries to UN agencies, each must take ownership of the Goals in their particular contexts – acknowledging that all Goals are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

The NGO Major Group recommends the following regarding the SDGs under review in 2017:

- Goal 1: Addressing the causes and manifestations of structural poverty requires holistic, context-specific solutions interlinked with all other goals. Governments should report on their efforts to increase opportunities, wellbeing, and resilience among all sectors of society.

- Goal 2: To end hunger and all forms of malnutrition, we must change our agricultural production from high-input, industrial exploitation towards systems that support smallholders' livelihoods and preserve cultures and biodiversity.
- Goal 3: Efforts to achieve health-related targets should prioritize the full spectrum of services from promotion, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliation. Governments, through a multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach, must endeavour to remove social, cultural, and economic barriers to ensure full access to affordable, quality physical and mental health services for all.
- Goal 5: Obstacles to the actualization of gender equality and the fundamental rights of women and girls should be overcome through implementing laws and policies that prohibit discrimination, redistribute unpaid care work, promote equality in access to resources, education, and decision-making, in alignment with internationally agreed conventions and standards.
- Goal 9: All governments, including regional and local authorities, should promote inclusive, ecologically-sound industrialization and the provision of basic infrastructure that incorporates the protection of nature and participatory decision-making.
- Goal 14: SDG14 must be a keystone in protecting the oceans as a substantial part of the biosphere, a unique ecosystem, an integral part of human civilization and major food provider, and a common good with equal and fair access rights.

In keeping with the commitment to "Leave No One Behind," the full position paper of the Non-Governmental Organizations' Major Group details the ways in which the SDGs are interconnected, locally applicable yet requiring universal commitment, and essential for the eradication of poverty and promotion of prosperity for all.

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Annex. Full Position Paper of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Major Group

I. Introduction

In 2017, the UN High Level Political Forum will assess the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, focusing on “Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world.” As the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Major Group – which facilitates the engagement of a diverse group of NGOs in the HLPF – we offer our perspectives on each of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under in-depth review this year.¹

As recognized by the 2030 Agenda, NGOs play critical roles in SDG implementation: we raise awareness and mobilize; build capacity; design and implement projects; monitor and review policies; collect data; provide technical expertise; and both support and hold governments accountable to their commitments. We note with concern the shrinking space for civil society, and call for increased political and financial support for civil society participation at all levels and stages of implementation and review, to increase the Goals’ chances of success.

The 2030 Agenda is universally applicable, intersectional, and holistic; achieving the SDGs requires integrated solutions and relies on complementary roles of different actors in society. As governments assess their progress towards implementing the SDGs, we encourage consideration of this consolidated official input of the NGO Major Group.

I. SDG1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Ending poverty in all its forms is both the essential objective of and stimulus for achieving the SDGs. Multidimensional and extreme poverty are unlikely to end by 2030 under the current neoliberal macroeconomic system and resultant unequal distribution of wealth, power, opportunity, and resources. To achieve SDG1, it is critical to address the structural causes of poverty that exacerbate these problems.

Ending poverty requires multidisciplinary solutions interlinked with all SDGs. These include access to healthy and environmentally sustainable food and adequate nutrition (SDG2); health and well-being (SDG3); quality education (SDG4); gender equality (SDG5); water, sanitation, and hygiene (SDG6); and decent work and economic participation of all (SDG8). Strong mechanisms

¹ A full list of organizations and networks that contributed to this paper is available at the end of the document.

of social protection, national floors, cash transfers, child protection and essential services, and a transparent, participatory government and judicial system (SDG16) are required to eradicate poverty and redistribute wealth.

Governments must take context-specific approaches to eradicating poverty in rural and urban areas, and people living in poverty must participate in the design and implementation of these policies and programmes. These must include protection of natural resources upon which poor people depend; equitable access and ownership of land and availability of technical assistance, basic services and infrastructure; and decent work, financial services and legal protection including for migrant labourers and the urban and rural poor. Agricultural and trade policies of all countries must be brought in line with the SDGs, including by ending subsidies that harm small farmers and perpetuate environmentally unsustainable practices. Binding legal safeguards that protect the right to use and own land and access common resources must be instituted, and corporate grabs of land, water and forests must be stopped.

As half of the population living in extreme poverty are children, it is essential that all governments report to the HLPF on their efforts to achieve SDG1 for children. Targeting the most vulnerable and strengthening capacity to provide quality care can break the cycle of poverty and lead to more peaceful societies. Additionally, 70% of the world's poor are women and girls; implementation and reporting must be gender-sensitive.

Half of the people living in extreme poverty reside in countries affected by wars and violent conflicts, and at-risk communities throughout the world disproportionately suffer the effects of natural disasters, environmental degradation, and climate change. In partnership with CSOs, especially at grassroots level, governments must take bold measures to ensure inclusive access to decision-making, increase structural and psychosocial resilience among vulnerable communities, and create opportunities for people to improve their livelihoods.

II. SDG2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

The incorporation of a human rights framework into the planning and achievement of the SDGs is essential to ensure food and water sovereignty and adequate nutrition for all. Governments must redirect their investments in research and development away from institutions that promote unsustainable, monopolistic agriculture - which contributes to biodiversity decline, pollution, and soil erosion - towards diverse and agro-ecological alternatives. Food waste should be reduced and available food redistributed, rather than intensifying agricultural production at the expense of biodiversity and animal welfare.

We call for the use of the precautionary principle when implementing new technologies, and exhort companies to internalize environmental and human health costs of GMO and pesticide use and other unsustainable practices. Policies should decentralize and plan food systems that link rural communities and urban centres, providing smallholders access to local markets and fostering strong place-based economies.

Progressive realization of the right to food for smallholders and ensuring sustainable livelihoods for all, including women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples, requires access to markets, credits, natural resources, information, and social protection. Biodiversity, soil health, and wildlife conservation are central to increasing food security and improving nutrition through sustainable diets. The sustainable production of nutritious food requires that we learn from and live in harmony with nature, preserving the environment on which we all depend.

Governments must therefore promote programming that develops knowledge to practice sustainable agriculture, and support stakeholders across the food system – primary small and family farm producers, food chain workers, and small and medium enterprises, particularly producer-led enterprises and cooperatives.

III. SDG3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Health is a precondition for and an outcome of sustainable development, eradicating poverty, and achieving gender equality. For example, treatment of non-communicable diseases plunges millions of families into debt each year. Good health and well-being improves the ability of persons of all ages to complete their education, increases access to opportunities, and reduces inequalities.

SDG3 actions should prioritize the full spectrum of services from promotion, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliation, and must be regularly reviewed using relevant indicators and World Health Assembly Resolution A69/76. Governments must remove social, cultural, and economic barriers to ensure full access to affordable, quality health services and psychosocial support for all vulnerable populations, including women, children, adolescents, older persons, persons with disabilities, displaced persons and refugees, and those in post-disaster or conflict and post-conflict zones. This must include integration of mental health services into primary care; access to affordable medicines; stemming antimicrobial resistance; capacity building; planning and implementing comprehensive, adequately funded health plans and strategies; collecting disaggregated data for women and girls; and enacting laws that protect human rights and take comprehensive measures to address violations.

A multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder approach will accelerate progress for SDG3, including ensuring access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene, ending hunger, and improving nutrition for all. Efforts to achieve gender equality – ending violence against women and ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health and rights – are the foundation for bodily autonomy and therefore of health and well-being.

Investing in physical and mental maternal and child health, as well as early parenting support and early childhood education and care, is key to poverty reduction. Progress for SDG3 also depends on mitigating the effects of climate change and environmental risks with far-reaching implications, including on the health and well-being of all people, food and agriculture production, and sustainable industrialization. Governments should help identify and scale up, with adequate budget allocation, civil society programmes that represent best practices in healthcare.

IV. SDG5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Mainstreaming gender equality across the 2030 Agenda and empowering all women and girls are key to eradicating poverty and achieving prosperity, as well as to ensuring healthy ecosystems and peaceful societies. Achieving SDG5 is heavily dependent on the other SDGs; it requires: zero tolerance to gender-based violence; elimination of hunger; equitable access to affordable healthcare and education; protection of natural resources; clean water and sanitation; provision of social protection; guarantee of decent, fairly remunerated work; and redistributing unpaid care work and providing paid parental leave.

Effective implementation of SDG5 requires the adoption, ratification and domestication of the CEDAW Convention, as well as all other relevant international instruments. National laws and policies must promote, protect and respect the rights of all women and girls. Transparent monitoring and review processes with defined roles and resources for civil society, especially women's organizations, are necessary to achieve long-term transformative change.

SDG implementation should prioritize the health and wellbeing of women and girls in war-torn countries and post-disaster situations, taking into account climate change and vulnerable island states, indigenous land issues, genocide and femicide, migration and security in movement, and extractive industries and exploitation.

The successful implementation of SDG5 is key to the entire 2030 Agenda. Governments and all stakeholders should identify and overcome obstacles to its actualization, which include multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination; gender inequality in participation in decision-making

and accessing resources; inadequate funding; failure to align national policies with internationally agreed conventions; inadequate systems for monitoring and reporting; and exclusion of feminist and women's movements in decision-making at all levels.

V. SDG9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Inclusive, ecologically-sound industrialization and the provision of basic infrastructure are critical for economic and social development, reducing poverty and inequality, guaranteeing environmental sustainability, and ensuring decent work for all. Infrastructure development that ignores economic, environmental and social costs can impact long-term economic viability and undermine the environmental foundation on which people's livelihoods, well-being, and cultural life depend.

Infrastructure initiatives that incorporate the protection of nature, equitable rights and access to land and other resources, and inclusive and participatory decision-making can bring measurable and lasting benefits to economies and societies. We must move towards a low-carbon, resilient and sustainable model of infrastructure development, in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

All governments, including regional and local authorities, should promote responsible investment in green procurement and sustainable infrastructure, to ensure affordable and inclusive services for the benefit of all and avoid exacerbating environmental degradation and climate change. Policies should regulate the private sector to ensure their products are environmentally-friendly, non-toxic, durable, and recyclable. Sustainable and affordable transportation, energy, water, sanitation, information and communications technologies, health care facilities and roads networks are essential for the functioning of an inclusive and resilient society and the improvement of well-being.

We note with concern the trend of leveraging private sector finance for developing large infrastructure, and urge public institutions to promote access to information and accountability, to avoid conflicts of interest and threats to communities and their lands. Local content considerations must be adopted in large infrastructure and industrialization projects.

Civil society has much to contribute to SDG9. Examples include the newly founded Women4Climate Initiative, which mobilizes women mayors in support of sustainable industrialization and supports the New Urban Agenda to build resilient, inclusive, and

sustainable cities.

VI. **SDG14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development**

Healthy oceans and coasts provide food for more than 3 billion people. SDG14 must be a keystone in protecting the oceans as a substantial part of the biosphere, a unique ecosystem, an integral part of human civilization and major food provider, and a common good with equal and fair access rights.

Better management and protection of critical ocean resources and biodiversity will secure long-term benefits from healthy oceans. Fisheries rely on healthy ecosystems, and must be connected to the enforcement of the FAO SSF Guidelines in all relevant aspects of SDG14. A strong environmental policy promoting marine reserves with relevant no-take zones and adherence to the limits for sustainable fishing above maximum sustainable yield is essential, taking into account the precautionary principle and ecosystem approaches. Harmful subsidies to the fishing sector and the widespread practice of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing must be stemmed. National policies for all countries, particularly island states, must be proposed and implemented.

The constitution of marine reserves in areas beyond national jurisdiction must be separated from new utilizations and financialization of marine resources and must be defined transparently, based on requirements of nature conservation and marine genetic material declared as a common good by an international legally binding instrument on biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction. We call for a ban of all deep-sea mining activities, which inevitably lead to irreparable ecosystem damage and human rights violations in affected communities, and affirm that it is not included in SDG14.

Eighty percent of marine pollution comes from land-based sources. Without accepting planetary boundaries and a comprehensive circular economy we will not be able to protect the marine ecosystems. To reduce negative impacts and stem the tide of climate change, nutrient contamination, plastic and microplastic waste and the discharge of toxins, we must focus environmental policy on precautionary solutions, effective regulation and taxation of unsustainable practices. Protecting our oceans is furthermore heavily dependent on the degree of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures taken by the global community.

VII. SDG17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Political will and sustainable financing are crucial to eradicate poverty, promote prosperity and uphold human well-being. A transformational 2030 Agenda requires a paradigm shift from competition to cooperation, including redistributing wealth and resources to eradicate inequalities.

Governments must shift from regressive to progressive tax systems, and implement financial transaction taxes to help curb illicit flows and mobilize revenue to implement the 2030 Agenda. Industrialized countries must fulfil their commitment to devoting 0.7% of GDP to ODA by 2020, and replace austerity policies with fiscal policies that achieve just, equitable, environmental and humane development. The power of corporate actors to influence legislation must shift dramatically in favour of a new Earth jurisprudence that protects the natural world.

Appropriate data collection and impact assessments of innovative and inclusive methodologies are required for effective monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs. This includes disaggregation of data by income, gender, age (in 5-year intervals), race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics.

Financial inclusion, which positively impacts 7 of the 17 SDGs, should be included in all financial regulatory mechanisms. Owner-operated businesses (cooperatives) and other models of the social and solidarity economy enable sharing in decision-making and profits, to shift power structures towards an economy that empowers participants.

Key actions that must be undertaken to support SDG17 include:

- Implementing legally binding frameworks that ensure compliance to human rights, gender equality, and environmental protection;
- Addressing corruption and curtailing economic activities with adverse social and environmental outcomes;
- Timely implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda; and
- Soliciting substantial progress reports from implementing institutions, including the UN.

Governments should promote partnerships with civil society in policy design, implementation, monitoring, and review, to maximize their contribution to the SDGs. The unique and essential contributions and expertise of marginalized people and people living in poverty should be recognized and included in monitoring and review, to inform national and global policy decisions.

VIII. Interlinkages and Conclusions

The 2030 agenda states that the SDGs are ‘integrated and indivisible’: no goal or target can be achieved in isolation. Only a holistic, coherent, multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder response can prioritise the most marginalized groups, adequately protect the environment and biodiversity, and create peaceful societies. A nexus approach that identifies and emphasises key interlinkages among the SDGs will advance their implementation, including by contributing to policy coherence for sustainable development.

Structural causes of economic, social, environmental, and security challenges that hinder the implementation of the SDGs must be addressed. These include the shrinking democratic space for civil society and social movements as well as lack of government transparency and accountability. Solutions must reflect the expertise of all marginalized groups such as women and youth, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, fisherfolk and small scale farmers, ensuring their access to decision-making processes and sustainable technology. Attention must be given to peace and security issues, as sustainable development and sustainable peace are mutually dependent.

Global increases in conflicts, natural and human-made disasters, and forced migration flows are also directly related to global militarisation and fundamentalism, climate change, disaster induced displacement, and increasing pressure on natural resources, particularly through extractive activities which threaten livelihoods and the environment. Inclusive, democratic governance for sustainable development and peace is therefore crucial.

Data, indicators, and all measurements of development should go “beyond GDP” and include holistic and disaggregated indicators that accurately measure well-being for all, and that account for quality of life, social inclusion and equity within planetary boundaries.

Consistent collaboration must be maintained among governments, the UN, and civil society, including in national strategies for sustainable development and through parallel reporting by civil society. Review processes at all levels should include inclusive accountability mechanisms to improve evaluation and actions reflecting the holistic nature of the Agenda.

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