



Brussels Policy Briefing n. 54

Sustainable agriculture: where are we on SDGs implementation?

Organised by CTA, ACP Secretariat, European Commission (DG DEVCO), Concord

Wednesday 27th February 2019, 9h00-13h00

European Commission, Charlemagne Building, Lord Jenkins room,
Rue de la Loi 170, 1040 Brussels

<http://brusselsbriefings.net>

BACKGROUND NOTE

1. Context: a global commitment towards sustainable development

The Millennium Declaration and the associated Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) shaped a social service delivery agenda of primary relevance to developing countries. In contrast, the recently adopted 2030 Agenda and the associated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) mark a much more comprehensive – and transformative – agenda for sustainable development that in addition to the social sector also encompasses issues of production, consumption and governance. To monitor progress according to this new agenda requires a monitoring framework which is not only strong and rigorous, but also much more comprehensive than any global or national monitoring efforts previously.¹

In September 2015, the United Nations (UN) agreed on the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**², an ambitious agenda that seeks to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure peace and prosperity for all by 2030. The 2030 Agenda is guided by 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 measurable targets. It aims to “end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and to ensure lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources” (UN, 2015b). Above all, the 2030 Agenda pledges that no one will be left behind, and all will share the benefits of sustainable development. The SDGs are separate, but there is an understanding that the goals are interrelated and can only be achieved through partnership and knowledge sharing.

*The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018*³ highlights progress being made in many areas of the 2030 Agenda. Since the turn of the century, the maternal mortality ratio in sub-Saharan Africa has declined by 35 per cent and the under-five mortality rate has dropped by 50 per cent. In South Asia, a girl’s risk of marrying in childhood has declined by over 40 per cent. And, in the least developed countries, the proportion of the people with access to electricity has more than doubled. Globally, labour productivity has increased, and unemployment rate decreased. More than 100 countries have sustainable consumption and production policies and initiatives.

However, the report also shows that, in some areas, progress is insufficient to meet the Agenda’s goals and targets by 2030. This is especially true for the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Youth are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. Less than half of all children and adolescents meet minimum standards in reading and mathematics. In 2015, 2.3 billion people still lacked even a basic level of sanitation service and 892 million people continued to practise open defecation. Close to 1 billion mostly rural people still lack electricity. In sub-Saharan Africa, the HIV incidence among women of reproductive age is 10 times the global average. Nine out of 10 people living in cities breathe polluted air. And, while some forms of discrimination against women and girls are declining, gender inequality continues to hold women back and deprives them of basic rights and opportunities.

¹ European Parliament. Directorate General for external Policies. Monitoring the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals – The role of the data revolution. 2016

² UN. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018.
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

³ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2018/TheSustainableDevelopmentGoalsReport2018-EN.pdf>

Conflict, climate change and growing inequalities add additional challenges. After a prolonged decline, the number of undernourished people rose from 777 million in 2015 to 815 million in 2016, mainly due to conflicts and drought and disasters linked to climate change.

The global indicator framework was developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) and agreed to, as a practical starting point at the 47th session of the UN Statistical Commission held in March 2016. The report of the Commission, which included the global indicator framework, was then taken note of by ECOSOC at its 70th session in June 2016.⁴

2. Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

SDG2 is the goal to end hunger and malnutrition and double the productivity and incomes of smallholder farmers by 2030 on whose success many other SDGs build.

While agriculture, food and nutritional security are key to SDGs, the complexity of the challenges is such that many other changes across sectors need to happen to realise the transformation of food systems towards greater benefits for the poorest.

Currently, there are nearly 800 million people worldwide going hungry, more than 90 million of them being children under five years old (FAO, 2016). At the same time, there is vast evidence to suggest that there is enough food to feed everyone on the planet. Eliminating hunger and all forms of malnutrition is not only about increasing food production, but also about increasing food quality/nutritional value, raising incomes, strengthening food systems, and improving access for all people. Malnutrition and hunger can best be eliminated through a combination of social protection measures, such as targeted nutrition initiatives, and pro-poor investments in productive activities (UN, 2016). Such measures serve to increase the incomes of small landholders and other poor households, improving their ability to manage risks and invest.

Ending hunger can have several positive impacts on our economy, health, education and equality (UN, 2016): the SDGs are interconnected, and the success of SDG 2 is intertwined with the success of other goals. Conservation and natural resource management are intimately connected with the goal of ending hunger. Supplies of fresh drinking water and availability of agricultural land are shrinking. Ecosystems and biodiversity are threatened by unsustainable agricultural and industrial practices. The growing global population and the (current and projected) impacts of environmental and climate change are expected to put more pressure on these already stressed systems (FAO, 2016; Szabo et al. 2016). Conversely, a better -nourished population can more productively contribute to the economy, will achieve more in school, and will put less strain on healthcare systems. Addressing SDG2 therefore requires government, civil society and the public to work together, which in turn will require strong mechanisms for accountability and transparency.

2.1. SDG2 Monitoring and Accountability Framework

The Framework's primary goal is to show whether, how, and where governments and development partners are making progress toward ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture, while holding all parties mutually accountable. This coordination includes the "50 by 2030 Initiative," to align country visions and donor commitments to deliver SDG2 and grow enough food to feed the world. Further initiatives aim to share expertise in reporting on SDGs and mapping of donor commitments.

2.2. Progress in achieving Goal 2 in 2018

After a prolonged decline, world hunger appears to be on the rise again. Conflict, drought and disasters linked to climate change are among the key factors causing this reversal in progress.

- The proportion of undernourished people worldwide increased from 10.6 per cent in 2015 to 11.0 per cent in 2016. This translates to 815 million people worldwide in 2016, up from 777 million in 2015.

⁴ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg2>

- In 2017, 151 million children under age 5 suffered from stunting (low height for their age), 51 million suffered from wasting (low weight for height), and 38 million were overweight.
- Aid to agriculture in developing countries totalled \$12.5 billion in 2016, falling to 6 per cent of all donors' sector-allocable aid from nearly 20 per cent in the mid-1980s.
- Progress has been made in reducing market-distorting agricultural subsidies, which were more than halved in five years—from \$491 million in 2010 to less than \$200 million in 2015
- In 2016, 26 countries experienced high or moderately high levels of general food prices, which may have negatively affected food security.

With just 12 years left to the 2030 deadline, achieving the 2030 Agenda requires immediate and accelerated actions by countries along with collaborative partnerships among governments and stakeholders at all levels.⁵

Feeding the 10 billion people projected to live on planet earth in 2050 must aim to go beyond producing more with less to balancing the focus on quality and diversity, linking productivity to sustainability and addressing the needs of people.⁶

3. Investing in Data is critical for SDGs implementation

In response to the High-level Panel of Experts' (UN, 2013) call for a 'data revolution', in 2014 the UN Secretary General formed a group of experts to advise him on the opportunities offered by a data revolution for sustainable development. Their report *A World That Counts*⁷ was published in November 2014. The report formulates the SDG monitoring vision that 'Never again should it be possible to say, "we didn't know". No one should be invisible. This is the world we want – a world that counts.' (IEAG, 2014:3). It highlights two global and overarching challenges for the current state of data and thus for SDG monitoring:

- The challenge of invisibility – gaps in what we know from data, and when we find out.
- The challenge of inequality – gaps between those with and without information, and what they need to know make their own decisions.⁸

The SDGs framework has two specific targets on accountability, both with a strong data component. Together, these targets envision an increased availability and quality of data (especially disaggregated data), enhanced capacity-building at country level and effective monitoring of sustainable development outcomes.

Collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of reliable, timely, accessible and sufficiently disaggregated data are critical for better evidence-based policymaking. Today's technology makes possible to collate the data we need which is vital for governments, international organizations, civil society, the private sector and the general public to make informed decisions and to ensure an accurate review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.⁹

Tracking progress on the SDGs requires the collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of an unprecedented amount of data and statistics at subnational, national, regional and global levels, including those derived from official statistical systems and from new and innovative data sources.

The monitoring of the MDGs brought about significant advances in the systematic and concerted collection and use of data for monitoring their progress across countries. However, data collection and monitoring in developing countries faces a range of challenges.¹⁰

⁵ Report of the Secretary-General, [The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018](#)

⁶ FAO. Transforming Food and Agriculture to achieve the SDGs. 2018. <http://www.fao.org/3/I9900EN/i9900en.pdf>

⁷ A world that counts. Mobilising the data revolution for sustainable development. 2014. <http://www.undatarevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/A-World-That-Counts.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.undatarevolution.org/report>

⁹ A Collaborative Process towards a SDG2 Accountability Framework. GODAN. Technical Report. March 2017. [file:///C:/Users/boto/Downloads/LaperriereSzaboetal.2017%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/boto/Downloads/LaperriereSzaboetal.2017%20(1).pdf)

¹⁰ European Parliament. Directorate General for external Policies. Monitoring the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals – The role of the data revolution. 2016. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ReqData/etudes/STUD/2016/578020/EXPO_STU\(2016\)578020_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ReqData/etudes/STUD/2016/578020/EXPO_STU(2016)578020_EN.pdf)

Producing data for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires strong political commitment and increased resources to support global and national efforts to strengthen statistical systems.

The Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data¹¹, adopted at the 48th Session of the Statistical Commission in 2017, provides a roadmap for the modernization and strengthening of statistical systems. Where possible, global monitoring should be based on comparable and standardized national data obtained through well-established reporting mechanisms from countries to the international statistical system. The collaboration between national statistical systems and regional and international organizations is essential for ensuring an effective flow of international comparable data. Such mechanisms can be improved by strengthening the coordination function of national statistical offices in the national statistical systems. UNGA meeting BMGF/FAO/UN pledge on coordinated support to ag statistics.

4. Partnerships required for the implementation of SDGs

The UN currently lists 3,782 “voluntary commitments and multi-stakeholder partnerships” addressing 167 targets across the 17 SDGs. These initiatives range from large-scale global commitments to joint action through to small-scale collaborative projects for specific local impact. The active partners include every size and nature of organization from the agencies of member states to community NGOs and from global corporations through to local co-operatives. The diversity of the SDG partnerships is one of their strengths and accurately reflects the level of global engagement with sustainable development. But it also presents a challenge to the UN in terms of monitoring and supporting these partnerships: reliable data and sound guidance are required to inform good partnership practice and to help partners to achieve the potential value of cross-sector collaboration.¹²

The achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs will require different sectors and actors working together by pooling financial resources, knowledge and expertise. Partnerships for sustainable development are multi-stakeholder initiatives voluntarily undertaken by Governments, intergovernmental organizations, major groups and others stakeholders, which efforts are contributing to the implementation of inter-governmentally agreed development goals and commitments, as included in Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the Millennium Declaration, the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) entitled “The Future We Want”, the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Sustainable Development Goal 17, which reads “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development”, recognizes multi-stakeholder partnerships as important vehicles for mobilizing and sharing knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, particularly developing countries. Goal 17 further seek to encourage and promote effective PPPs and civil society partnerships.

4.1. The EU institutions and the SDGs

The European Union (EU), its institutions and member states have played a key role in the design and adoption of Agenda 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Paris Climate Agreement. The lead EU monitoring report on the SDGs “Sustainable Development in the European Union” produced annually by Eurostat tracks performance against a well-designed indicator framework drawing primarily on official Eurostat statistics, as well as statistics from other official and non-official sources.¹³

¹¹ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/hlg/cape-town-global-action-plan/>

¹² Maximising the Impact of Partnerships for the SDGs ; Stibbe, D.T., Reid, S., Gilbert, J.; The Partnering Initiative and UN DESA (2018). https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2564Maximising_the_impact_of_partnerships_for_the_SDGs.pdf

¹³ Exposing EU policy gaps to address the Sustainable Development Goals. Study. European Economic and Social Committee. 2018. <http://unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/QE-02-19-009-EN-N-4.pdf>

In November 2016, the European Commission released its first “Communication on the next steps for a sustainable European future” which outlines the EU approach to implementing the SDGs and identifies two work streams: 1) Mainstream the SDGs in the European policy framework and current European Commission’s priorities; and 2) Launch a reflection paper to further develop a longer-term vision and the focus of sectoral policies after 2020, preparing for the long-term implementation of the SDGs. In this Communication, the European Commission announced the creation of a Multi-Stakeholder Platform (MSP) bringing together the different stakeholders of the public and the private spheres to support the implementation of the SDGs in the EU. The European Commission also committed to providing regular reporting on the EU’s progress towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The Communication was accompanied by a staff working document providing an overview of the main European actions and policies related to the SDGs. Further, the Communication on “Proposal for a new European Consensus on Development: Our World, our Dignity, our Future” and the Joint Communication from the European Commission and the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy “A renewed partnership with the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP)”, both adopted in November 2016, lay out the foundations for renewed Partnerships between the EU and developing countries largely based on Agenda 2030.

A joint declaration by the EU Parliament, the Council, and the European Commission was adopted in June 2017 reiterating the strong commitment of the EU and its member states to implement in full the 2030 Agenda and to achieve the 17 SDGs. The Council called on the European Commission to set out by mid-2018 an implementation strategy with timelines, objectives and concrete measures to implement the 2030 Agenda in all EU policies. Further, it called on the European Commission to identify by mid-2018 gaps where the EU needs to do more by 2030 in the areas of policy, legislation, governance structures for horizontal coherence and implementation. Finally, the Council called on other UN member states and all stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector, to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In October 2018, the conclusions from the European Council meeting mention explicitly the strong commitment of the EU and its Member States to the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.

4.2. A key role for the private sector

Unlocking the potential of the private sector is fundamental to progress. Engaging with entrepreneurs and tapping into the know-how of the private sector, including agricultural producer organizations, cooperatives, small and medium-sized enterprises as well as international corporations, is a pre-requisite for implementation of the 2030 Agenda. More than just a source of financing, private sector partnerships promise technology development, knowledge transfer and innovation, job creation and alternative revenue streams.¹⁴

To meet these goals, countries around the world will need to mobilize trillions of dollars in new investments at a time when global growth is slowing, and overseas development assistance is declining. As a result, many governments are turning to the private sector as a source of new investment to support infrastructure and other development projects. The World Bank Group is taking a similar approach and recently launched the Partnership Fund for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG Fund) that aims to raise trillions in development financing, including through partnerships with the private sector in order to incentivize catalytic activities that strengthen SDG implementation, equipping countries with tools and best practices to achieve their sustainable development objectives ahead of 2030.

The Business and Sustainable Development Commission¹⁵ which is a group of CEO’s and civic leaders that were convened by the UN recently put out a report identifying twelve trillion dollars of opportunities that can be created through achieving the SDGs.

5. Going forward

¹⁴ FAO. Transforming Food and Agriculture to achieve the SDGs. 2018.

¹⁵ <http://businesscommission.org/about>

The SDGs are ambitious and cover all key aspects of sustainable development and apply to both developing and developed countries. However, what makes the SDGs commendable—the fact that they are so comprehensive and integrative—also presents an unprecedented planning and implementation challenge. Reviews on implementation targets and realistic deliveries should inform us on what will not be achieved or completed and alternative/further work to be done.

A fundamental premise for delivering sustainable food and agriculture is the creation of an enabling policy environment and the need for sectoral ministries to strengthen the coordination of policies across government.¹⁶

Over the past decades, developing countries have strengthened their ability to build upon the use of censuses (e.g. household, agricultural, etc.) and household surveys (e.g. living standards, health, food security, etc.), as well as on the administrative data that they are in possession of, to develop quite a strong basis for monitoring progress towards the MDGs. However, there is a need to commit additional resources to their national and sub-national statistics to develop the necessary capacities required to monitor progress on the SDGs, building further on the advances achieved to date. Bilateral, multilateral, and regional development partners have a vital role in supporting and facilitating these efforts, with UN agencies playing a coordinating role, not least under the 2030 Agenda.¹⁷

Objectives of the Briefing

To improve information sharing and promote networking, CTA, the DG DEVCO from the European Commission, the ACP Secretariat, Concord and various media organise since 2007 bimonthly briefings on key issues and challenges for agriculture and rural development in the context of EU/ACP cooperation. The Briefing will promote exchange of views and experiences around: (i) the SDGs tracking in respect to agriculture and food security and especially SDG2; (ii) achievements and best experiences in developing partnerships for SDG2 implementation; (iii) next steps on SDG2 delivery.

Target group

More than 120 ACP-EU policy-makers and representatives of EU Member States, embassies of ACP countries, civil society groups, research networks and development practitioners, and international organisations based in Brussels.

Available material

Input and comments before, during and after the meetings will be included in the Briefings blog: <http://brusselsbriefings.net/>. A short report and a Reader in printed and electronic format will be available after the meeting.

¹⁶ FAO. Transforming Food and Agriculture to achieve the SDGs. 2018.

¹⁷ European Parliament. Directorate General for external Policies. Monitoring the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals – The role of the data revolution. 2016.