

Major Group Position Paper

The Workers and Trade Unions Major Group's vision and priorities for the Sustainable Development Goals

March 2014

Introduction

This short position paper details the Workers and Trade Unions Major Group's vision and priorities - including themes, goals, targets and indicators – for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the wider post-2015 development agenda and the High Level Political Forum (HLPF). It forms part of the European Commission-funded multi-stakeholder engagement programme "[Sustainable Development 2015](#)" (*SD2015*). This paper provides an opportunity for the Major Group to communicate and consult on its position as a basis for ongoing stakeholder engagement, capacity building and advocacy.

The paper sits alongside similar position papers authored by the other Major Groups. A synthesis report of these position papers is provided by Stakeholder Forum in order to identify common priorities and important differences across the Major Groups' positions and compare them with the [Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals](#)' (OWG) 'focus areas', published in February 2014. The review will be used as a basis for engagement between the Major Groups and the OWG, and to establish priority clusters for further coordination and advocacy work on those themes. The individual papers will be updated by the respective Major Groups in September 2014 following a series of global and regional capacity building, outreach and advocacy exercises under the *SD2015* programme.

Workers of the world are beginning to lose faith in the capacity of governments and the international community to address serious challenges like unemployment, inequality, environmental degradation, hunger, disease, climate change, just to mention a few. We see the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda as an opportunity for the world's leaders to show that they are still committed to global agenda which places people at the centre. In this light, we maintain hope that the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Framework will set the stage for a better, fairer future, where our natural endowment is respected and preserved for future generations, where peoples' rights are respected and upheld and where democratic involvement of all the world's citizens is the norm.

Summary

The international trade union movement aims to push the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Framework beyond a piece-meal, silo'd and sustainability-blind approach, to one that truly integrates the three pillars (economic, social and environmental) of our societies, as identified in the Rio +20 outcomes. While we acknowledge that our societies are far too complex to be radically altered by a set of internationally agreed goals, we believe that the United Nations has the capacity to, at the very least, orient policy making in the right direction.

The labour movement is mobilising internationally towards the same objectives as we mobilise nationally: ensuring workers and their families have access to a decent life and a decent job in a healthy environment, while securing the needs and ensuring opportunity for future generations. This means demanding commitments to Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for all and Ensuring Universal Social Protection. It means commitments to Universal Free Quality Education and Health, to Gender Equality and to reducing Income Inequality. It means Environmental Protection, and Access for All to sustainable energy, healthy and nutritious food, water and sanitation while ensuring that human activity respects planetary boundaries.

Our Position

The origin and foundation of the trade union movement is to provide workers and their families a voice, to protect workers' rights and to fulfil a vision for a fair world. We continue this struggle in a world where precarious or informal work is increasingly the norm; inequalities threaten the stability of our societies; financial markets reign supreme with inadequate regulation, even less accountability and still even less connection to the real economy; trade is

unbalanced, tax justice is far from a reality; and environmental challenges threaten the survival of our communities.

The Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda provides an opportunity for the international community to expose these injustices and address them in a coherent and authoritative manner, underpinned by the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA). There is no such thing as development or social progress without environmental sustainability, or if inequalities, unemployment, precarious work and social exclusion remain the norm for the majority of the world's population.

As the international trade union movement we call for specific commitments, as 'stand-alone goals', on Decent Work for All and Universal Social Protection in the Post 2015 Sustainable Development framework. We further support the call for a stand-alone goal on Universal Free Quality Education.

Over 200 million people were unemployed in 2012, including 75 million young people. Even those who have jobs often suffer from insecurity resulting from underemployment or casual and vulnerable employment. At 40% of the global economy the informal economy remains a growing concern, especially in developing countries, where it accounts for between 60 and 90% of total employment, the majority being women. Workers in the informal economy lack access to health care, retirement pensions, maternity leave and other social transfers, keeping their social income much lower than their counterparts in the formal economy and making them more vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks. Nearly 1/3 of all workers live with their families below the poverty line.

Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for all is a key element of social and economic development. Through job creation, quality public services and better working conditions, people, communities and countries can lift themselves out of poverty, improve livelihoods, engage in local development and live together in peace. This happens only when work is decent—environmentally-sound and productive—provides fair wages, and is underpinned by rights. Decent work also requires consistent investment in education and training for the young and adults. A decent work goal must include concrete targets for full employment, investment in green job promotion, and reduction of informal and precarious work, ensure a minimum living wage as well as compliance with international labour rights for all workers with gender equality at the workplace. The ILO Decent Work Agenda provides a useful reference for the understanding of decent work and its components as well as indicators for the measurement of the progress on its implementation.

More than 75% of people on our planet do not have access to social protection. Meanwhile, universal social protection is a direct and efficient way of reducing inequalities, and adopting a goal on social protection would provide a more coherent approach to the interrelated social policy elements that made up the Millennium Development Goals. A socially committed, rights-based SDG framework would prioritise this approach as it promotes dealing with people's vulnerability in a sustainable, more equitable way than the current, aid-dependent approaches.

A commitment to **Universal Social Protection should implement social protection floors (SPFs)** as defined in the Bachelet Report, and the ILO Recommendation 202, which has set an international standard to be applied at national level. This implies extending globally two main elements: social transfers providing minimum income security, and access to essential goods and services for all those in need including the unemployed and informally employed, the poor, the disabled, pregnant women, the elderly and children and the provision of quality public services such as sanitation, health and education. Moreover, the floor has to be conceived as the first step of a comprehensive social protection system; thus, it has to be linked with other social, labour and economic policies as detailed in ILO Convention 102, within an integrated national development strategy. In terms of financial sustainability, while social protection remains the responsibility of governments, a Global Fund for Social Protection should be established to introduce or strengthen social protection floors in the poorest countries. The economic benefits are also proven in that social protection creates a basic demand floor and acts as an automatic stabiliser.

Universal free quality education is urgently needed when 57 million children of primary school age and 69 million adolescents are out of school, while 774 million adults, two-thirds of them women, are illiterate. Governments globally are not meeting their funding commitments to education, and where they do make investments, these benefit the privileged at the expense of the most marginalised, effectively widening inequalities. Governments have the responsibility to provide sufficient funding for public education through progressive and fair taxation. Investments should also be directed to ensuring decent working conditions and improving teachers' competences through quality pre- and in-service training/professional development and matched by the appropriate tools and environments. Every student, irrespective of their social status, ethnic background or gender, has the right to be taught by a trained, qualified and well-supported teacher, and learn in safe educational institutions with adequate

infrastructure, facilities and resources, including an appropriate student-teacher ratio.

A broader transformational package, where issues such as environmental protection, inequality, gender equality, and energy, water and sanitation, and food must also be articulated as specific commitments or goals in the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Framework.

A healthy environment and respect for planetary boundaries requires that each commitment in the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Framework enshrine the need for our societies to share fairly our natural resource endowment while preserving it for future generations. This said, the agenda must go beyond simply mainstreaming environment, in order to respond to the urgency of human activity that goes beyond planetary boundaries. Our current use of natural resources in a majority of areas poses the risk of creating irreversible change. If some issues have a space in global governance, such as climate change or biodiversity, others still lack an all-encompassing governance framework, such as chemical dispersion. We must be forward-looking and secure a global commitment to address these issues. This is critical for the labour movement as we demand the industrial transformation necessary to drive positive investment and creation of decent work in new sectors, and the fundamental protection for the lives and health of working families around the world.

Reducing inequalities: Growing inequality in all corners of the globe hampers the possibility to ensure dignity to all citizens and poses serious risks to democracy, peace and economic stability. There is no disputing the current trends in inequality. It is in this context that the MDGs approach must be reviewed, as it was driven by a narrow focus on aid and an economic model, rooted in private-sector-led growth, which has not been able to reduce inequality, but instead contributed to its expansion. A commitment from governments to eradicate poverty while at the same time working to ensure more equal societies must be founded on an integrated social protection floor, minimum living wages and collective bargaining along with other social policies as needed, and should be underpinned by the human rights-based approach and redistributive justice.

Gender Equality and Women's Rights and Empowerment must be explicitly addressed. The MDG on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment lacked a focus on realising women's rights, provided no safeguards against member states 'equalising down', and gave no substantive definition of women's 'empowerment'. We call, therefore, for a stand-alone goal to achieve gender equality, including the empowerment of women and the full realisation of women's human rights. Such a goal must be framed to generate a re-organisation of power, wealth and resources, with the aim of ending all forms of discrimination and violence, including gender-based discrimination and sexual violence; guaranteeing women's equal participation at all levels of political and public life and decision-making; women's equal rights to land and property; all women's sexual, bodily and reproductive autonomy free from stigma, discrimination and violence. Targets and indicators for reaching the gender equality and women's rights goal must include the collection of data and statistics, disaggregated by, among others, gender, age, location, disability, and socio-economic status to inform the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of laws, policies and programs.

Energy, food, and water and sanitation are critical elements of a dignified life and must be addressed from human-rights based perspective. It is also crucial to address these issues according to national realities in order to create or strengthen public institutions which are sustainable and capable of providing these essential elements. The energy transformation needed to address both lack of access and the climate challenge has the potential to change the lives of millions and reduce our societies' pressure on the planet. A Post-2015 Sustainable Development framework must also help build resilience to food crises and secure working families' capacity to feed their families with healthy food. The role of income support policies associated with social protection will be critical in supporting these desired outcomes. Finally, it is critical to maintain the commitment to provide universal access to water and sanitation. The past decade has shown that private-led partnerships have been unsuccessful to provide water and sanitation access to the levels required. A renewed, public-led momentum should be built to ensure there will be 100% access to water and sanitation in the next set of goals.

Goals, Targets and Indicators

Through the creation of robust and comprehensive targets, we hope to avoid misinterpretation or a levelling down of ambitious goals. For three of the commitments proposed by the trade union movement, we have identified targets which should compose each goal and indicators to monitor progress. While we agree that indicators should be adapted to national contexts, we also believe that a minimum set of core indicators should also be applied universally.

We acknowledge that work remains for the other proposed goals we would like to see reflected in the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Framework, and we intend to support and collaborate with other active parts of the Major Group community to this end.

Goal: “Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for all”

Target	Indicator(s)
Full and productive employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment-to-active population ratio • Employment growth rate • Annual hours worked per employed persons • Labour productivity – GDP per employed person
Reduction of vulnerable employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of own-account and contributing family workers in total employment • % of people engaged in informal work relations among the active population
Reduction of the working poor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of employed people living in poverty • Wage inequality (relation between the highest and lowest wages) • % of workers whose salaries cannot cover a minimum living standard
Introduction of a minimum living wage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum living wages established • Minimum living wage as % of median wage • Existence of a Minimum Wage Board
Ensuring rights at work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ratification and implementation of the eight ILO Core Labour Conventions and compliance in law and practice • % of workplaces with Collective Bargaining Agreements and Supporting Policies
Ensuring gender equality at work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ratification and implementation of the ILO Convention No. 183 on maternity protection, No. 156 on workers with family responsibilities and No. 189 on domestic workers and compliance in law and practice • Gender wage gap • % of women in total workforce
Ensuring decent working conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive hours • Occupational injury rate (fatal and non-fatal) • Length and Frequency of annual leave • Ratification and implementation of the ILO Convention No. 155

on Occupational Safety and Health and compliance in law and practice

Ensuring effective social dialogue

- Union registration
 - Enterprises belonging to employer organisation
 - Collective bargaining coverage rate
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Ensuring a just transition to sustainability

- Number of green jobs as % of total employment
-

Goal: “Ensure Universal Social Protection”

Target

Indicator(s)

Global target:

Establishment of a Global Fund for Social Protection

- Establishment of a Global Fund for Social Protection as proposed by UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights
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Implementing policy framework for social protection

- Ratification and implementation of ILO Convention 102 on social security
 - Implementation of the universal Social Protection Floor based on ILO Recommendation No 202
 - Spending on social protection as a % of GDP
-

Guaranteeing income security and basic social services during childhood

- % of children and of total population with access to essential Health care, education, goods and services
 - % of children receiving cash and in kind support
-

Guaranteeing income security for unemployed, sick, mothers and people with disabilities

- % of men and women in active age who are not working due to unemployment, sickness, maternity or disability and who receive support
 - Beneficiaries of cash income support (% of the poor)
-

Guaranteeing income security for elderly

- % of population aged 65 and above benefitting from a pension
-

Goal: “Ensure Universal Free Quality Education”

Target

Indicator(s)

By 2030, every child completes a full

- Percentage of children and young people who participate in and complete early childhood, primary, lower and upper secondary education and who demonstrate learning achievement broadly-defined, determined through multiple measures consistent with
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cycle of continuous, free quality early childhood, primary, lower and upper secondary education.

By 2030, all young people and adults have equitable access to quality post-secondary education and lifelong learning.

appropriate national standards, disaggregated by at least disability, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status;

- Percentage of children and young people taught by trained and qualified teachers with an appropriate student to qualified teacher ratio;
- Percentage of educational institutions that have safe and adequate infrastructure, accessible facilities, resources and learning materials for all students;
- Percentage of educational institutions that have adequate numbers of qualified education support personnel, as well as food, transport, health and psychological services;
- Breadth of curriculum, including gender-sensitive, non-discriminatory content, teaching resources and materials reaching beyond literacy and numeracy to include global citizenship and life skills content;
- Percentage of literate young people and adults, disaggregated by at least disability, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, among others;

By 2030, sustained and sufficient financing is in place to guarantee free quality education for all.

- At least 6 % of GDP and 20 % of national budgets are spent on education
 - Percentage of publicly financed and regulated educational institutions that do not charge fees and are not for profit;
 - Existence and financing of mechanisms to enable teacher, student and civil society participation in education policy-making.
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Monitoring and Evaluation and Cross-Cutting Issues

The definition of goals and targets will only contribute to sustainable development if human rights and democracy are at the heart of the framework. A human-rights based framework should not only be present at the stage of the definition of the goals, but also at the implementation and evaluation. This is why we believe that democratic ownership, built on strong democratic structures and processes, like social dialogue, respect of international human rights commitments and ILO core labour standards, as well as inclusive, pro-active consultation mechanisms with major group constituencies at the national level are fundamental elements of the success of the framework.

Regrettably, the MDG framework failed to fully reflect the breadth and depth of human rights standards and instruments. Driven by a poverty eradication agenda, the MDGs did not look at structural or systemic issues and therefore did not enable true social, economic and environmental transformation.

Concretely, this means that, for example, we cannot talk of 'achieved development' in a given country if labour standards and decent work are not promoted, the right to collective bargaining is not respected, and participatory modalities such as social dialogue are not granted in the first place. This is why the worker and trade unions group supports the Human Rights Based Approach to development.

Further, we believe that equity is the essential foundation for securing any right; while inequalities continue to undermine the right to development. The Post-2015 Sustainable Development agenda must overcome all forms of discrimination, including those based on age, belief, class, caste, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, geographic location, language, race, and religion. This includes overcoming multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. All targets should be disaggregated in order to ensure that the most marginalised enjoy the same rights as the as the least marginalised. The workers and trade unions major group calls

an agenda for change that is not simply concerned with justice but that is energetically and aggressively pro-poor.

Next Steps

The trade union movement fights for each one of the elements described above at all levels, from the workplace, to sectoral, national and international levels, and in so doing contributes to fairer, more sustainable societies for working people. The Post-2015 Sustainable Development Framework provides an opportunity to aggregate and introduce some of these actions at the international level.

Outreach efforts are ongoing so that unions can relate to this agenda and link it to their national realities. This effort is being coordinated by the International Trade Union Confederation along with other organisations in the Global Unions' family, and includes awareness raising about the process, its connection to union work and its relevance to the broader debate on global economic governance.

At the technical level, the Trade Union Development Cooperation Network (TUDCN) is engaging national trade unions, global unions and solidarity organisations to ensure the broadest outreach to our members. This engagement takes the form of regular meetings, working groups and online consultations

The trade union movement acknowledges that further work and political involvement will be needed for this agenda to become a vehicle for social progress and sustainability. Future work will be oriented towards that goal.

Conclusion

The economic paradigm governing our societies is unsustainable. The Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda provides an opportunity to frame the future of UN actions on the ground under a new direction—one that delivers equality, social inclusion, decent work and sustainable livelihoods for working people while protecting our environment.

This will require ambition from the world's leaders. A Post-2015 Sustainable Development agenda will only be effective if it is relevant for working people and underpinned by the Human Rights Based Approach. Decent Work for all and Social Protection for all are critical components in this regard, and they must be considered by governments as fundamental steps in building dignity for the world's citizens.

The labour movement will also stand in support of other goals considered critical for the advancement of our societies towards sustainability, like education, environmental protection and planetary boundaries, gender equality, reducing inequalities, and energy, food, water and sanitation.

Finally, in order to ensure real progress on the ground, targets need to be country-owned, democratically defined and supported by active consultation of major group constituencies at the national level.