



Innovation, Participation, and Connections for Change

Building actionable solutions in times of crises

Together 2030 Sectoral Paper Submitted to the High-Level Political
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Opening Statement

In 2019, before the first SDG Summit, **Together 2030** submitted a [position paper](#) entitled “Realizing the SDGs for All: Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality for Every Person, Everywhere” in which we stated that “ensuring inclusiveness, equality, and equity means approaching the SDGs in an integrated manner” (p.2).

Today, four years later, we are still fighting to make monitoring, and follow-up of the SDGs more participative, horizontal, and equitable in a world facing multiple crises, the sustained impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflicts and a climate crisis.

Consequently, it is not surprising that a narrative accusing the 2030 Agenda of being a futile instrument is gaining traction in different countries and across every social network. This is an expression of our failure to make the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs an agenda for all people, everywhere.

Together 2030, was created in 2015 as a continuation of the efforts made by civil society worldwide to reach an inclusive, strong, and ambitious Agenda 2030 during its negotiation process. We aim to generate and share knowledge on the implementation and accountability of the Agenda and its SDGs and to project the voices of civil society and stakeholders worldwide on the challenges and opportunities of implementing them.

From that perspective, **Together 2030** approaches the 2023 HLPF as an entrance door to a series of critical summits taking place in the immediate future: the second SDG Summit later in 2023, the Summit of the Future in 2024, and the still-to-be-called Social Summit in 2025.

The world is clearly behind in reaching the SDGs in 2030. Furthermore, most of the targets aimed for 2020 have yet to be achieved, with backtracking, making today’s results behind our starting position in 2015.

To accelerate the SDGs implementation, it is urgent to move from promises to actions that are based on quality data, meaningful integration of all stakeholder’s capabilities and resources, and a more muscular and open multilateralism with the UN at its core. We urgently need to improve implementation and reporting quality, allowing us to share knowledge and lessons learned and foster international cooperation to promote transparency and accountability, increasing available resources to implement the SDGs, including financial resources and, above all, much stronger political will.

Recovering from COVID-19 while implementing the 2030 Agenda will require addressing the vulnerabilities that were experienced before the pandemic exacerbated inequalities.

Action must be taken now.

Introduction: Accelerating the Recovery of COVID-19. Reflections & recommendations

The SDGs are inexplicably linked to COVID-19 recovery. Essential to the recovery process from COVID-19 are the specific needs of the most vulnerable populations. This means emphasizing children, youth, women, the elderly, indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities, among other groups left behind, or at risk of being left behind, in an equitable recovery.

COVID-19 has caused unprecedented disruption to education systems that will trigger new and increased gaps between countries in the medium and long term. Governments and international actors must invest in developing inclusive education systems, which enable all children to access quality education. Initiatives to ensure that children return to school should target those most at risk of not returning and those out of school before the crisis.

Addressing the impact on gender equity is critical. The disproportionate impact that COVID-19 has had on women and girls, especially those with disabilities, reverses the gains made in gender equality in the past decades. A recovery from COVID-19 must ensure measures that address vulnerabilities and root causes with a clear focus on social inclusion and gender equality. That will be only possible by including women's voices in public policy design, implementation, and monitoring.

The pandemic also exacerbated the exposure to physical, emotional, and sexual violence. Before the pandemic, more than half of all children worldwide lived with daily exposure to different forms of violence. Evidence shows that violence against children can have a life-long impact on children's emotional and behavioral development, educational attainment, health, and overall well-being. Any recovery from COVID-19 should effectively address the issue of violence against children. Failing to do so can result in a massive loss of social and economic capital that could last for generations.

Additionally, the long-term response must focus on strengthening health systems to achieve universal health coverage. Efforts to strengthen health systems must be inclusive of people with disabilities. HSS efforts and activities must include people with disabilities, systematically removing barriers to accessing quality health services.

Policy and Enabling Environment

(a) Creating ownership of the SDGs

Efforts to promote SDGs ownership intensity and openness were different between countries and are linked to the strengths of democracy in each state: countries with more robust democracy tools tend to be more open to including stakeholders in open discussions.

When analyzing the mandates of national institutions in charge of leading SDGs implementations and follow-up processes, some have weak or even forgotten "communication and awareness building" components. An increase in governance for SDGs quality at all levels and paying renewed attention to local efforts are needed to promote ownership and write a new and credible 2030 Agenda narrative in response to multiple attacks it faces.

In addition, identifying national and local vulnerable groups beyond the traditional ones pointed out in the 2030 Agenda still needs to be completed. Locating those groups and supporting their capabilities to meaningful participation in the SDGs implementation and monitoring is critical to promote ownership without leaving entire groups behind.

(b) Incorporation of the SDGs in national frameworks

SDGs have been incorporated into national development frameworks worldwide through national development plans/strategies. However, there is still work to do in creating capabilities at the local level to consistently consider the SDGs in the design and follow-up of their policies and actions.

Including the SDGs as a primary reference for national development could become an empty-of-real-contents decision if SDGs are not considered in national and local budgeting and the international community fails to provide support to increase data availability to follow its implementation.

(c) Integration of the three dimensions

Considering the 2030 Agenda's five "critical areas" (the "5-Ps"), human rights international law and environmental agreements in decision-making provide a concrete path to promote a holistic approach to the implementation of its commitments, helping to design integral public policies.

The COVID-19 pandemic response, with its well-known areas of failure and success, the integrated nature of the interlinked crisis the world is facing, the impacts of the aggression against Ukraine in food chains across the globe, and the nature of the wicked problems we are called to solve are expressions of the integrated nature of the sustainable development. We will fail if we pretend to provide siloed solutions to those challenges.

Goals and Targets

Below are **Together 2030** specific recommendations on the SDGs under review. It is worth mentioning that dividing these recommendations into the goals to be examined in depth by the 2023 HLPF is a way to organize them to facilitate the debates. Still, all of them are inextricably connected, and their potential for change can only be unleashed if they are understood as a whole.

SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation

- *Multisectoral collaboration must be strengthened:* As all SDGs are connected, linkages and collaboration between ministries of health and other ministries, such as education, social welfare, environment, and water resources, should be systematically strengthened to ensure proper and coordinated measures that provide a sustainable response to the water crisis.
- *More focus on local capacities:* Approximately 80% of the financing of international cooperation in water and sanitation is intended to maintain the current coverage of services that do not provide safe water for human consumption instead of serving the population that still does not have service. They fail to focus on developing local capacities for self-sustainability and quality of services. Shifting this paradigm is critical to achieving the SDGs.

- *NTD and WASH programs:* Use WASH data in Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD) programs and NTD data in WASH programs to highlight inequities, target investments, and monitor progress. Similarly, use existing infrastructure such as schools and community health centers to implement integrated NTD and WASH programs. The Development of cost and budgeted roadmaps for improving WASH and NTDs services is also critical.
- *Ensure data integration:* Core indicators for WASH in health facilities should be integrated into routine health monitoring, such as HMIS.

SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy

- *Energy and social protection policies to fight inequalities:* Access to affordable and clean energy is critical for the success of traditional social protection policies. Education cannot be provided if schools do not have access to technologies that require power, and comprehensive energy programs cannot be developed. Equally, healthy eating cannot be practiced if the population does not have access to clean energy for cooking, the digital gender gap cannot be closed if there is no broad access to energy that considers the reality of women, etc. For this reason, the intensity of the consideration of access to affordable and clean energy should be included as part of social policies. In public policy design, states would also consider that spending on domestic fuels, electricity, and gas has a proportionally higher weight in the budget of the poorest households.
- *Technology transfer for affordable and clean energy production from developed to developing countries:* Energy production opportunities is fundamental to closing global inequality gaps and boosting growth in less developed countries.
- *Affordable and clean energies in today's interlinked crises:* All the crises we face today, including the sustainable overcoming of the impacts of COVID-19, include elements linked to access, distribution, and consumption of affordable and clean energy.

SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

- *Cooperation for innovation:* International cooperation in all its forms (North-South, South-South, and Triangular) must increase the cooperation for innovation component, focusing its objectives on overcoming current difficulties with a long-medium and long-term perspective.
- *Traditional knowledge could be as innovative as any other knowledge:* Innovation does not always mean new technologies. Traditional knowledge and wisdom can provide innovative ways to face old problems in their actual forms. Creating space for dialogue between traditional and new knowledge sources would lead to better innovative solutions than only focusing on the latter.
- *Integrate policies for industrialization and the fight against climate change:* Promoting economic growth in underdeveloped countries while avoiding or mitigating its environmental effects requires policies that favor investments in sustainable technologies, goods, and associated services.
- *Generating incentives:* Incentives and institutional frameworks must be created to favor innovation and the construction of sustainable infrastructures as the basis for industrial

development that is also sustainable. The use of exemptions and imposition of green taxes is an instrument that requires further development in several countries worldwide, as is the exchange of debt for environmentally clean industrial development.

SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities

- *Promotion of green spaces in cities:* Essential steps to moving towards sustainable cities and communities should include creating green and wild areas in and around cities for sustainable food production, urban agriculture, recreation, and environmental education to foster community and a sense of belonging through sustainable community projects.
- *Creation of resilient and sustainable infrastructure:* Governments, civil society, and the private sector must work towards the adoption of sustainable design and construction techniques, the protection of green areas, and the promotion of biodiversity in urban areas. This also includes promoting bioclimatic design to incentivize and force the creation of healthy buildings constructed with sustainable materials, including solar panels and recycled water.
- *Children and cities:* Children have specific needs that should be considered in city planning. Sustainable cities must provide them with safe spaces to play, including options for disabled children and secure and always open access to schools and related infrastructures, among the main facilities. City planning and infrastructure projects' priorities definition must include children's voices.
- *Ensure citizens' participation to promote sustainable cities:* Creating spaces for citizens to engage in the conversation that seeks solutions to urban problems is essential. Cities must facilitate local youth consultations and encourage the creation of digital platforms that allow citizens and civil society to express their most urgent needs and provide their inputs to sustainable solutions in their cities or communities.

SDG 17 – Partnership for goals

- *Supporting innovative technologies:* By encouraging the adoption of sustainable practices that unite companies, civil society, and government institutions to align interests.
- *More meaningful engagement:* Not only formal participation in a previously decided format, but ensuring the transparency and accountability that is needed to deliver SDG 17.
- *Applying new methodologies to ensure stakeholders' meaningful participation:* Several methods, such as "17-Rooms" and its regional, national, and other scales adaptations, provide new tested tools to enrich stakeholders' engagement in decision-making, improving ownership and building trust among sectors while focusing on concrete, achievable solutions to current challenges.
- *Fiscal policies for sustainable development:* Establishing a fiscal policy framework that considers financing the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda is necessary. For this, it is required to strengthen tax systems and develop active fiscal policies capable of reducing tax evasion and ensuring the redistribution of social wealth among all members of society. This cannot be achieved without an effort by governments to modernize their statistical systems, supported by international cooperation, which considers the

incorporation of data from non-traditional sources and those provided by non-governmental actors.

- *Localization of statistics:* Among the efforts to increase the disaggregation of available data, special attention should be paid to strengthening its localization to be able to evaluate and plan local policies based on data.
- *GDP per capita as a measure of sustainable development:* Should be abandoned in favor of multidimensional measurements, integrating sustainable development's three dimensions.

Conclusions: Recommendations to accelerate the full implementation of the SDGs

Approaching the 2030 Agenda as a whole, **Together 2030** and its members suggest the following actions to accelerate our path towards sustainable development, overcome COVID-19 impact, and help to face the current global intertwined crises:

Main recommendations:

- It is necessary to boost a gradual but sustained introduction of new technologies and solutions, especially in the most vulnerable communities.
- Promote the active participation of women and girls in decision-making and access to leadership opportunities.
- Implement new educational models using virtual platforms and digital tools to provide access to education inclusive of all including children with disabilities and learning difficulties
- Ensure national indicators reflect the level of disaggregation needed to fulfill SDG commitments by providing information on the status of data collection or plans to improve data availability to inform efforts to leave no one behind. This includes information on disability disaggregated data. Ensuring no one is left behind means knowing who is being left behind, by how much, and in what areas. The Inclusive Data Charter (IDC) is a valuable tool to this end. It advances availability and encourages using inclusive and disaggregated data while fostering transparency, accountability, and knowledge sharing to ensure no one is left behind.

Recommendations for HLPF 2023 and beyond

- *The clock is ticking:* The 2023 HLPF should be recognized as the 'most action-oriented HLPF session ever. Countries should move from identifying general suggestions and known barriers to Sustainable Development to overcoming them while promoting concrete and actionable solutions to the most urgent problems.
- *Quality over quantity:* The 2023 HLPF should represent a change in the 2030 Agenda monitoring as we know it. It should move away from the "more the merrier" mindset and provide a better guide and opportunity to increase the quality of the Voluntary National

Review reports and the information on the SDGs implementation. A meaningful VNR debate is worth many VNRs presentations with no concrete results.

- *Innovate, innovate, and innovate!* Thinking out of the box and being innovative should be a 2023 HLPF goal. Attempting to innovate while using the same strategies and language in each Ministerial Declaration is virtually impossible. The HLPF should challenge the UN “agreed language” and catalyze new political approaches that tackle an ever-fast-changing reality.
- *In our times, to lead is to include.* Sustainable development is too important to leave it to governments alone. The 2030 Agenda clearly states that countries are the main ones responsible for promoting their national sustainable development. This does not mean they are the “only ones” responsible. Countries will fail in promoting sustainable development if they do not create enabling environments for stakeholders to participate in decision-making and solutions-building processes.
- *A synergetic way ahead.* 2023 and 2024 will be critical for building a sustainable future for all, even beyond 2030. The 2024 Summit of the Future and its ministerial preparation meeting in 2023, the unfolding UNDS reform at the national and regional levels, and the HLPF must be seen as holistic interdependent efforts. There is no chance for ‘persons, people, and planet’ or for those we are leaving behind without a more muscular multilateral system with the UN at its core. The 2023 HLPF must secure these linkages and ensure opportunities for cross-pollination among them.

Methodology and Process for Preparation of this paper

To draft this position paper, **Together 2030** has conducted a desk review of its activities from 2019 to 2022.

In parallel, an open call for inputs was launched and shared with our Global Advocacy Task Group and our entire Membership.

Together 2030 also prepared an Executive Summary that was submitted to UNDESA in March 2023.

Diversity of Opinion within civil society:

Members of Together 2030 express and prioritize different aspects of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs and provide a broad range of views regarding its implementation and follow-up.

Together 2030 members are united in the following objectives:

1. To strengthen partnerships between civil society and stakeholders to support the effective implementation of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.
- 2 To make the voices of people heard and have people holding governments accountable for the progress towards achieving Agenda2030 and the SDGs at all levels.

Contact and further information:

www.together2030.org

contact@together2030.org

twitter.com/Together_2030

