

Meeting of Regional Governments. A Territorial Agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals: learning between regions

Valencia, November 2 and 3, 2017

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THE MEETING

The Meeting of European and Non-European Regional Governments which was held in Valencia (Spain) on November 2 and 3, 2017, served as an opportunity to exchange experiences related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at regional level.

The meeting focused on discussing, exchanging and reflecting on experiences of good practices at regional level for the territorialisation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and on sharing planning processes which have an impact on the shaping of public policies for effective regional implementation of the SDGs.

The meeting was attended by representatives of ten regional governments of Spain, Italy, France and Tunisia, universities, international organisations and civil society organisations.

The meeting focused its work on two objectives:

- 1) Discussing the role that regions can play in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the territory and
- 2) the importance of sharing experiences and disseminating results.

GOOD PRACTICES AT REGIONAL LEVEL

The regions presented and highlighted the efforts which are being made to promote territorial development in an integrated, inclusive and sustainable manner, as well as the difficulties encountered along the way and future challenges for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the territories.

These experiences shared the following points:

- The implementation of the Agenda is an opportunity for regions to redefine their policies, promote transparency, evaluation and accountability.
- The regions regret the lack of mutual coordination and recognise the need to promote shared learning.
- The need for participation by civil society in the Agenda. The general lack of knowle-

dge among citizens of SDGs has been highlighted, along with the importance of involving all citizens in the process of implementation. From this perspective, the Agenda represents an opportunity both for new leadership at regional level and for citizen participation.

- Four areas of work have been defined for the regional governments: 1) informing citizens about the implementation process; 2) raising awareness of the reality of development and the opportunities of the new Agenda; 3) engaging public policies; 4) accountability for achievements in the process of implementation.
- Even though it became clear that processes for implementing the Agenda are not homogeneous throughout the regions, there was a clear consensus that leadership would come from the highest level of government.
- The importance some territories attach to working with specific sectors that are deeply rooted in the region, for example, the automotive or agri-food sector in Emilia-Romagna Region ([link](#)).
- International cooperation is the starting point for implementation of the Agenda in many regions and, as pointed out by the Tuscany Region, this emphasises the importance of implementation, since it helps the process of raising awareness and the work of persuasion. Nonetheless, there is a clear consensus on the need to separate the Agenda from environmental and international cooperation policies.
- All experiences have encountered difficulties regarding monitoring and evaluation. There are pilot experiences focused on concrete SDGs, such as those of the Tunisian regions, where work has been carried out in 9 cities on the employability of the young population, with proposed indicators and targets ([link](#)). In this context, the decisive role of National Statistical Institutes in the development of indicators was addressed.
- A political Agenda: the Agenda is not neutral, it is political. Different goals and objectives coexist which are sometimes contradictory. In this sense, another element

of consensus is the evidence that there are different roles and functions for municipalities, regions and large cities, being complementary but at the same time separate.

- A multilateral Agenda: regions face difficulties in understanding the complexity of an Agenda generated by multilateral agencies and which interferes with national policies. This places it beyond the political scope of states or regions.
- In Spain, some autonomous communities such as Catalonia, the Basque Country or Navarre have drawn up government plans, proposed concrete measures and aligned their policies with the SDGs (these plans are, respectively, *The 2030 Agenda: Transform Catalonia, Improve the World, Agenda Basque Country 2030* and *Resolución Parlamento de Navarra*). The starting point of these processes is diverse, and special emphasis is placed on the fact that each territory must make their own way towards the agenda and that it is important to know the context of institutional, budgetary and social agents.

MAIN CHALLENGES AT REGIONAL LEVEL

Three particular challenges at regional level were extracted from this discussion on good practices:

- a) The need to develop coordinated external and internal policies with the goal of strengthening policy coherence, especially in economic policies.
- b) The need to carry out an in-depth analysis of the opportunities to territorialise the Agenda through cities, albeit in very different ways, depending on the territorial context.
- c) Establishment of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms which serve as a measure of comparison with other regions, and the need to make greater efforts to develop suitable indicators.

STRATEGY TO IMPLEMENT THE 2030 AGENDA IN SPAIN

In the case of Spain, the Delegate Commission

of the Government for Economic Affairs, in its meeting of September 28, 2017, adopted the agreement that creates the High-Level Group for the 2030 Agenda in the Spanish state. The mission of this group is to coordinate Spain's position and promote the actions necessary to achieve the 2030 Agenda objectives, as well as to prepare Spain's evaluation of data to be presented at the ECOSOC High-Level Political Forum. Spain will present its first voluntary national report on SDGs at the next forum in 2018.

Three elements stand out in the implementation of the Agenda in Spain: 1) the identification of leverage policies; 2) the need to establish proper evaluation and accountability mechanisms and, 3) the necessary commitment to developing countries.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR INTERACTION AND COORDINATION

The institutional frameworks for interaction and coordination between the different government levels in the territories is another requirement arising from the implementation of the Agenda. There is a general need for establishing a dialogue between state and regional levels with the aim of making a diagnosis to identify the most relevant problems.

Especially noteworthy are the implementation mechanisms which are being introduced through departments specialised in development and planning in some Latin American countries (Colombia, Mexico and Peru), which have been particularly successful in promoting the Agenda.

The emphasis has been placed on advancing slowly and completing participative processes with the intention of achieving an inclusive, transformative agenda with broad social support.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The global approach must be a reality at regional level. To this end, the importance of local culture must be stressed, making the opportunities and challenges explicit, by incorporating the global and the local aspects in a single discourse and taking into consideration national

and international dimensions. In this regard, the role of Objective 17 (Alliances) in aligning policies between regions has been highlighted.

The OECD, through national policies, promotes the formulation of an action plan with four priorities: 1) making the SDGs visible from the OECD perspective; 2) developing a set of indicators; 3) initiating a dialogue between agents and 4) expanding the territorial approach, where local agents can participate.

The emphasis has been placed on moving from a national policy to a regional policy which will be supervised by the territories, taking on responsibilities at all levels of government. With this in mind, it is necessary to take into consideration national disparities and the importance of conveying this discussion initiated in the regions to national and international fora.

PROGRESS MEASUREMENT OF SDGs

The success of the 2030 Agenda framework lies, among other parameters, on monitoring and accountability, along with the application of public policies adopted on the basis of empirical data. The latest United Nations [SDG Report 2017](#) emphasises the need for high-quality, timely and itemised data to enable evidence-based decisions which will ensure accountability for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Accordingly, the Spanish Network for Sustainable Development (REDS) contemplates the need for monitoring and data-based accountability which will help identify the achievement of objectives and obtain baseline data or a fixed-photo of the starting point. This *benchmark* will help set priorities, identify gaps or have a better understanding of problems and challenges and how to solve them. Clear examples of this are the *SDG Index & Dashboards* (www.sdgindex.org), a report prepared since 2015 by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the *US Cities SDG Index* (unsdsn.org/resources/publications/us-cities-sdg-index), which include city-level indicators.

The regions emphasise both the need for better statistical data gathering and the important role National Statistical Institutes of different countries can play. The United Nations indicators will serve as a starting point for choosing the minimums to measure objectives and targets

and be used to establish a shared level of basic indicators (with Europe as a possible frame of reference).

Indicators clearly show social problems and provide data at different levels, thereby contributing within the planning framework to align budget allocations with the objectives and targets set out in the agenda.

THE ROLE OF MULTILATERAL AGENCIES, REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS, UNIVERSITIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Local governments do not lie within the scope of the United Nations; nevertheless, this gap can be bridged thanks to the support offered by International Organisations such as UNDP for the Agenda's incorporation at regional level.

Regional groups, including the Organisation of the United Regions (ORU Fogar, www.region-sunies-fogar.org/es/), stress the influence of regions organised on platforms when talking about global challenges and the role of European regional experts at the service of development.

Another example is the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (www.femp.es), which emphasises the need for networking at national, European and international levels. As these processes are complex, advances will be greater if regional governments establish links with national processes, thereby increasing their capacity to have an influence on the international stage.

One element to be taken into consideration is the need to draw up documents which serve as references for the regions' representatives and help construct a joint reflection and narrative.

Civil society organisations also play a decisive role in the implementation of the Agenda. These can play a prominent role in transferring certain political demands to regional governments, both at the budgetary level, in line with norms and laws, and also with regard to indicators. One example is the work carried out in the process of preparing the Agenda in the case of Spain by the State Coordinator of Non-Governmental Development Organisations (NGDO) (www.coordinadoraongd.org). Another example in this regard is the work done by the alliance of three

Spanish NGOs (UNICEF, OXFAM-INTERMON and WWF Spain) and their document **“Agenda 2030: una oportunidad para las personas y el planeta”** (2030 Agenda: an opportunity for people and the planet). This work stands out for addressing the agenda in a comprehensive manner in both development and environmental fields.

Universities as institutions are deeply rooted in the territory and are a permanent space for reflection, which contributes to the transformation of policies. In regional implementation processes, universities also play a decisive role, yet to be fully exploited, with regard to the territorialisation of 2030 Agenda.

directly linked to economic policy at all regional levels.

- The need to establish shared frameworks of measurement for monitoring and evaluating implementation processes in regions opens up new opportunities for innovation in this field and networking.
- The advantages of being part of an international network at regional level in order to share good practices.

NEXT STEPS AND ORIENTATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION

- Strengthening the role of regional governments requires a greater legal framework, the creation of alliances with new agents and the territorialisation of SDGs through the municipalities. In this context, a second meeting on municipalities has been proposed.
- An agenda requiring all people, individually and collectively, to make greater efforts in education and raising people’s awareness.
- Sustainable human development as a political and institutional framework for advancing in the development of people-oriented policies and coordination between different agents.
- The Agenda as a process full of hope and inspiration in which regions must assume their share of responsibility, thus becoming an excellent reference in its implementation. With this in mind, they will need to become more visible at international level.
- Fairer governance networks. The challenge for territories to adopt instruments and approaches in order to achieve the planned objectives.
- The opportunity offered by the Agenda to review development processes at territorial level. The need for the Agenda to permeate all policies and move beyond the exclusive field of cooperation for development and environmental protection and become

Annex.

Links to resources:

Regarding indicators

- *SDG Index & Dashboards*. Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN): www.sdgindex.org.
- *SDG Report 2017*, United Nations: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2017/>
- *US Cities SDG Index*. Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN): unsdsn.org/resources/publications/us-cities-sdg-index
- *Counting on the world Report (2017)*: <http://unsdsn.org/resources/publications/counting-on-the-world/>. Thematic Network TRENDS, Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)
- *Global Partnership for SD Data*: <http://www.data4sdgs.org>
- *Indicator Preferences in National Reporting of Progress Toward the Sustainable Development Goals* (Livia Bizikova and Laszlo Pinter, June 2017): <https://www.iisd.org/sites/default/files/publications/indicator-preferences-national-reporting-progress-toward-sdgs.pdf>

Concerning localisation/territorialisation of SDGs

- *Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs: implementation and monitoring at subnational level*. UN Habitat: <https://unhabitat.org/roadmap-for-localizing-the-sdgs-implementation-and-monitoring-at-subnational-level>
- *Localising the SDGs*. Global Taskforce, UN Habitat, PNUD: localizingthesdgs.org
- *SDGs Cities Guide*. Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN): <https://sdgcities.guide>
- *Getting Started with the SDGs in Universities*. Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN): <http://unsdsn.org/resources/publications/getting-started-with-the-sdgs-in-universities/>
- *Meeting of Regional Governments*. 'A Te-

rritorial Agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals: learning between regions': <http://www.cooperaciovalenciana.gva.es/encuentro-de-gobiernos-regionales-2-y-3-de-noviembre-de-2017>

- Strategy for the Sustainable Development Goals of the Generalitat Valenciana (Valencian regional government): <http://www.cooperaciovalenciana.gva.es/estrategias>

Reports on the SDGs in Spain

- *2030 Agenda: an opportunity for people and the planet*. awsassets.wwf.es/downloads/INFORME_AGENDA_2030_INTERMONOXAM_UNICEF_WWF.pdf
- *Summary of the report SUSTAINABILITY IN SPAIN 2017. Observatory of Sustainability*: <https://goo.gl/GtN6rD>
- The 2030 Agenda: Transform Catalonia, Improve the World: <http://exterior.gencat.cat/en/ambits-dactuacio/afers-exteriors/delegacions-govern/Delegation-of-Catalonia-to-the-United-States-Canada-and-Mexico/noticies/noticia/El-Govern-impulsa-el-Pla-Nacional-per-a-la-implementacio-de-l'Agenda-2030-a-les-Nacions-Unides>
- Basque Country 2030 Agenda: <http://www.irekia.euskadi.eus/es/debates/1106?stage=discussion>
- Resolution of the Parliament of Navarre: <http://www.parlamentodenavarra.es/es/noticias/resoluci%C3%B3n-por-la-que-se-insta-al-gobierno-de-navarra-hacer-frente-los-retos-de-la-agenda>