

WATCHING BRIEF 19-9: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

As Quakers we seek a world without war. We seek a sustainable and just community. We have a vision of an Australia that upholds human rights and builds peace internationally, with particular focus on our region. In our approach to government we will promote the importance of dialogue, of listening and of seeking that of God in every person. We aim to work for justice and to take away the occasion for war.

October 2019

The aim of this brief is to provide an update on SDGs and suggested topics for correspondence to, or meetings with, Members of Parliament.

The Sustainable Development Summit in New York City in September 2015 adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the period ending 2030. The SDGs are:

1. *End poverty in all its forms everywhere.*
2. *End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.*
3. *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.*
4. *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.*
5. *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.*
6. *Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.*
7. *Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.*
8. *Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.*
9. *Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.*
10. *Reduce inequality within and among countries.*
11. *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.*
12. *Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.*
13. *Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.*
14. *Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.*
15. *Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.*
16. *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.*
17. *Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.*

There are 169 proposed targets for these goals and 304 proposed indicators to show compliance. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the UN's 15 year plan of action for people, planet and prosperity which seeks to eradicate poverty in all its forms and strengthen universal peace in larger freedom.

It is significant that the SDGs, unlike the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) they replaced, applies equally to all countries, and the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade expects NGOs to identify the financial and activity levels of their work against appropriate SDGs. This Brief is an updated report on how the SDGs are going, especially in Australia.

United Nations Development Program

As the lead UN development agency, UNDP is well-placed to help implement the Goals through its work in some 170 countries and territories. It supports countries in achieving the SDGs through **integrated solutions**. For UNDP, this means focusing on systems, root causes and connections between challenges—not just thematic sectors—to build solutions that respond to people's daily realities.

UNDP emphasises that achieving the SDGs requires the partnership of governments, private sector, civil society and citizens alike to make sure we leave a better planet for future generations. In 2018 it assisted some 100 projects in 38 countries.

IPSOS Poll

A recent global poll of 12,700 people by the survey company IPSOS revealed that there is a disconnect between what people think their governments spend on foreign aid (3-10% of annual budget) to the actual figures (less than 1%). There remains a large minority of people (up to 20%) in countries like UK, Japan, Hungary and South Korea who think there should be no foreign aid.

Whilst there is consensus about the substance of the SDGs there is divergence about how to achieve them. Most people say that all countries must be responsible for paying. Water and food are seen as the most vital priorities.

Government Report

In its report to the 2018 High-Level Political Forum on the SDGs, Australia drew attention to the use of a Reporting Platform as a whole-of-government initiative under SDGs. It is intended as a comprehensive and flexible instrument for accumulating relevant sets of data about implementing the SDGs in different sectors.

Progress

Brian Gleeson (currently President of the UN Association in the ACT) has had over fifty years of experience in the Australian Public Service and international development, working with and for most UN agencies for over fifteen years, including has head of the UN in Libya, setting up UN Women, working directly with five Heads of UN agencies and a previous Secretary-General as Senior Adviser in transition teams and change management.

Brian has done an assessment of Australia's performance in relation to the SDGs since 2015. His analysis identified the following points:

- Australia has dropped globally from 17th in 2015 to 38th in 2019 in its implementation of the SDGs.
- Australia is firmly on track to achieve only 3 of the 17 SDG Goals – SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 3 (good health), and SDG 8 (work). It is going well for SDG 3 and SDG 4 (education), but poorly in SDG 10 (inequality) and SDG 13 (climate change).
- There is limited coordinated action, especially by the government, and low public awareness.
- Priority should now be given to SDG 8 (sustainable growth), SDG 9 (infrastructure), SDG 11 (inclusion), SDG 12 (sustainable consumption), SDG 13 (climate change), and SDG 17 (global partnership).
- The UNAA is responding by holding a Sustainable Partnerships Forum in 2020, study tours to the UN for young leaders, and expanding Model UN conferences and Alumni networks.

The Transforming Australia website www.sdgtransformingaustralia.com summarises progress to date by Australia.

Of the targets assessed, 34% are on track, 23% need improvement, 18% need a breakthrough, and 24% are off track. Despite Australia's many advantages – wealth, health, skills, diversity – it is lagging: almost every goal has at least one target where an important indicator is off track or will require a breakthrough to be achieved. These include the adequacy of Newstart welfare payments (SDG 1), obesity levels (SDG 2), domestic violence (SDG 5), energy and water affordability (SDGs 6 and 7), household debt, stagnant wages growth and underemployment (SDG 8), investment in research and development (SDG9), income inequality and distribution of wealth (SDG 10), housing affordability and homelessness (SDG 11), hazardous waste generation (SDG 12), greenhouse gas emissions (SDG 13), Great Barrier Reef hard coral cover (SDG 14), threatened species (SDG 15), sexual assault and prison population (SDG 16) and official development assistance (SDG 17).

For further details see www.monash.edu/sustainable-development/news-events/2018-news/transforming-australia-sdg-progress-report

Senate Inquiry

On 4 December 2017 the Senate asked its Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee to examine the level of awareness of the SDGs across the government, business and wider community, how to monitor and improve their implementation, how they affect the aid program, how countries in the Indo-Pacific region are responding, and examples of best practice that Australia could learn from. The inquiry lasted over a year, including public submissions and hearings, and reported in February 2019.

Significant recommendations are:

- The Government should publish a national implementation plan and reports that track Australia's performance.
- The Government should create a national SDG secretariat to support implementation, and to integrate information on best practice SDG approaches into websites and policies.
- The Government should consider a national awareness campaign to engage all relevant stakeholders.
- The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) should include SDGs on its regular agenda, to assess opportunities at state and territory level.
- More support should be given by government to implementation by business and civil society through a multi-sectoral reference group.

Statement by NGOs

To mark the International Day of Peace (21 September 2019) 120 agencies from around the world (including the Quaker United Nations Office, the Canadian Friends Service Committee, the British Quakers, the Quaker Council on European Affairs, and Quaker Service Australia) issued a joint statement which included the following points:

- Recent research and analysis, from the World Bank and the UN among others, has demonstrated that neither economic growth alone, nor securitized and militarized approaches, can bring sustainable peace. In an interdependent world, increasingly impacted by the self-inflicted scourges of climate change and inequality, we need to redouble our collective efforts to prevent violent conflict by addressing its roots, and in structuring our response to crisis in ways that support local capacities, respect human rights and align with long-term plans to build sustainable peace.
- 2019 and 2020 both provide many opportunities for Member States to recommit to peace, including the September 2019 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Summit; the September 2019 Climate Action Summit; the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Women's Conference (2020); the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2020; and the review of the Peacebuilding Architecture and the 20 May 2019 report by the UN Secretary-General on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace.
- Our organizations call on the international community to: (a) move from commitments to action on peace in the 2030 Agenda and across the three UN pillars; (b) align crisis response with longer term prevention and peacebuilding efforts; (c) protect and support civil society in fostering sustainable peace - social, political and economic changes that contribute to increasing peace are more robust if they are owned, implemented and sustained by local actors, including youth and women; and d) think local and act global - recommit to multilateralism as a safeguard for the most vulnerable.
- Member States should also seek to strengthen a rules-based system that creates a more effective enabling environment that privileges the long-term peace, development and human rights of all people and communities.

Quaker Service Australia

QSA made a full submission to the government's aid program in May 2018, and has been actively promoting the SDGs in its own work. It notes that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has identified a lead department of government for each of the SDGs (see www.dfat.gov.au/aid/topics/development-issues/2030-agenda/Pages/sustainable-development-goals.aspx)

Each country has its own priorities and capabilities, and the DFAT platform 'Tracking Australia's Progress on the SDGs' points out that there is no official poverty measure used in Australia, and even the OECD relies on measures of income alone. Australia has a high median income, so the relative income poverty line is set at a higher level than most countries. This fact underlines the United Nations recommendation that indicators beyond those offered in the SDG guidelines may be used to complement the analysis.

Action

Friends are encouraged to make known to their MPs and Senators that:

- 1. Australia's adoption of the SDGs was a significant commitment to engage all countries in building a more peaceful world.**
- 2. The progress made within Australia in raising awareness of, and commitment to, the SDGs has fallen short of expectations.**
- 3. The level of official development assistance has dropped to 0.2% of GDP (well below the UN goal of 0.7% by 2025) and only one tenth the level of the Defence budget.**
- 4. The government should respond positively to the recommendations of the Senate Inquiry Report into the implementation of the SDG by Australia to enhance our commitment as a nation to an international effort to address major global concerns.**

Canberra
October 2019