



## Briefing: 7 tests for 7 years - what to look out for in Ireland's Draft Second National Implementation Plan on the Sustainable Development Goals

In September 2015, UN Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 'Agenda 2030'. The 17 goals and 169 targets contained within are integrated and indivisible, and balance the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, providing a holistic vision for the wellbeing of people and the planet, and placing equality and resilience at the core. They provide **the only universally agreed and universally applicable framework for global evidence-based policy-making in this crucial decade** - the Decade of Action.

**The just-published draft of Ireland's second National Implementation Plan for the SDGs comes at a crucial moment considering that we are almost at the halfway point of implementation.** Coalition 2030 is an alliance of civil society organisations working to ensure that Ireland keeps its promise to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, both at home and abroad; and the following are our 7 tests for this plan, reflecting that we are 7 years into the period of implementation between 2015 and 2030.

### **Test 1: Does the plan embed a 'whole-of-government' responsibility for achieving the SDGs?**

With such a short timeframe remaining to achieve the SDGs, it is imperative that any plan published by Government goes beyond awareness-raising at a departmental level, to instead ensuring that a genuine *responsibility for delivery* exists both *within* and *across* departments. We'll be asking; **does the plan provide a mechanism for a dedicated lead Government Department to be held accountable for achieving particular SDGs<sup>1</sup>?** We'll also be asking; **does ultimate responsibility for overall SDG achievement rest with the Department of the Taoiseach?** This would facilitate stronger political backing, buy-in across all other departments, and increased policy coherence across Government. What's more, **will the targets be time-bound**, preventing this Government from kicking the can down the road until the next Government is elected?

### **Test 2: Does the plan commit to ensuring all new government policies use the SDGs as a framework, uplifting the SDGs as a tool for policy-making, rather than as a 'retrospective stamp' on policies?**

March 2023 will mark the halfway point between when the SDGs were agreed and when they are due to be achieved. It is time we went beyond awareness raising and start instead to use the SDGs as an enabling tool for policy-making that can assist policy-makers to frame their thinking and ascertain where unacceptable trade-offs between SDGs are being made in the act of making policy. To this end, we ask; **does the plan show how the SDGs will be used as a tool for framing all strategies and**

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<sup>1</sup> For example are targets under SDG 3, Health and Wellbeing, understood by the Department of Health and seen by the Department of Health as their responsibility.

**plans produced by Government<sup>2</sup>? In turn, we ask; is there a mechanism to ensure that new policy strategies are coherent with all SDGs<sup>3</sup>**

### **Test 3: Does the plan provide for policy coherence in sustainable development?**

The SDGs are indivisible and interdependent. Improved integration across the goals would lead to balanced implementation, ensuring that progress in one area does not undermine progress in another<sup>4</sup>. Therefore we ask of this plan; **is there a transparent, well-resourced mechanism to identify and tackle inconsistencies in policy development?**

In addition to this, we emphasise the embedded nature of the economy and society within the environment, so called ‘embedded sustainability’ [see Annex 1], and note the push by UNESCO as well as our European colleagues to include culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development. We will therefore ask of this plan; **does it fall prey to prioritising the ‘economic lens’ on sustainability, rather than balancing the multiple facets of sustainable development?**

### **Test 4: Does the plan meaningfully acknowledge the crucial role of local authorities, communities and volunteering?**

As well as the ‘top-down’ strategy for implementation (typified by having lead Departments under the umbrella of the Department of the Taoiseach, with the latter having ultimate responsibility for SDG achievement) it is crucial to have a plan for enabling ‘bottom-up’ local action on the SDGs demonstrated in this plan. The importance of this has been pithily summarised as ‘No Transformation without Localization’<sup>5</sup>. Moving beyond informing and consulting, communities need to be true partners in the achievement of the SDGs, echoing Goal 17. Therefore we ask; **does the plan meaningfully reflect the importance of community, volunteering, and local authorities in the achievement of the SDGs? What’s more we ask; is the plan informed by the need by local authorities for guidance on how to embed the SDGs in city and county plans, such as the Local Economic and Community Plans? And are the roles of the PPNs and the LENs acknowledged as crucial to SDG implementation?**

### **Test 5: Does the plan demonstrate a clear rationale and purpose for stakeholder engagement, and a commitment to have input from marginalised and under-represented groups and individuals, also stating how this input will be gathered, and used?**

The plan for stakeholder analysis and identification should embody the principles to ‘Leave No One Behind’ and ‘target the furthest behind first’, which are fundamental to the SDGs. We’ll be asking; **does this plan name the marginalised populations it seeks to reach, demonstrate how it plans to reach them, and show how input from these groups will influence policy development?** This would demonstrate an understanding from Government that policies have differentiated impacts upon different populations. A sensitivity to this reality would convey a commitment to policy coherence, which should underpin this plan.

<sup>2</sup> For example, strategies regarding education should take all SDG targets into account, ensuring for example that our national strategy on education promotes life-long and life-wide education, rather than merely seeing education as within the remit of schools.

<sup>3</sup> For example, a strategy of Foreign Direct Investment (which may promote SDG 8) should not hinder progress towards SDG13, Climate Action. This will require cross-department work on SDGs.

<sup>4</sup> For example, balancing domestic policy on energy poverty with both international and domestic commitments on climate change, or the need to balance increasing Overseas Development Assistance with the need to invest publicly in healthcare and education in Ireland.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Karl, Executive Secretary, UN Capital Development Fund.

Moreover, should the SDG Champions programme progress, we must ask of the plan; **does it ensure robust accountability mechanisms for the Champions programme, a clear structure for bi-directional feedback, and is it driven by a desire for clear policy outcomes?**

**Test 6: Have the terms of the National Stakeholder Forum been improved?**

The National Stakeholder Forum has not been convened in over 30 months<sup>6</sup>. Despite the fact that the inclusion of a dedicated Forum for stakeholders is laudable, in practice it is clear that so far, it has not been deployed to its full potential. Therefore, upon publication of the plan, it is imperative to ask; **will the NSF be co-created with the stakeholders? Will it be genuinely participatory, and accessible across all sectors and populations? Will it be provided with adequate resources to allow it to fulfil its mandate? And will it be rooted in a clear purpose, which is communicated to all stakeholders before, during and after?**

**Test 7: Do we see a commitment to public communication on the SDGs, informed by timely and comprehensive data collection?**

Without knowing where we are, how can we know where we need to go, in other words what we need to improve? This plan needs to significantly improve upon existing reporting mechanisms for tracking achievement of the SDGs, which up until now have been sub-standard. In order to bring the country along in achieving the transformative programme of Agenda 2030, the public need to be sufficiently updated on progress in a timely fashion so that we can all collectively course correct. **We will be assessing the draft Plan to ascertain if it includes a mechanism to provide frequent, high quality and fully disaggregated data across all SDG indicators** which would be shared with all Government departments as well as Civil Society.

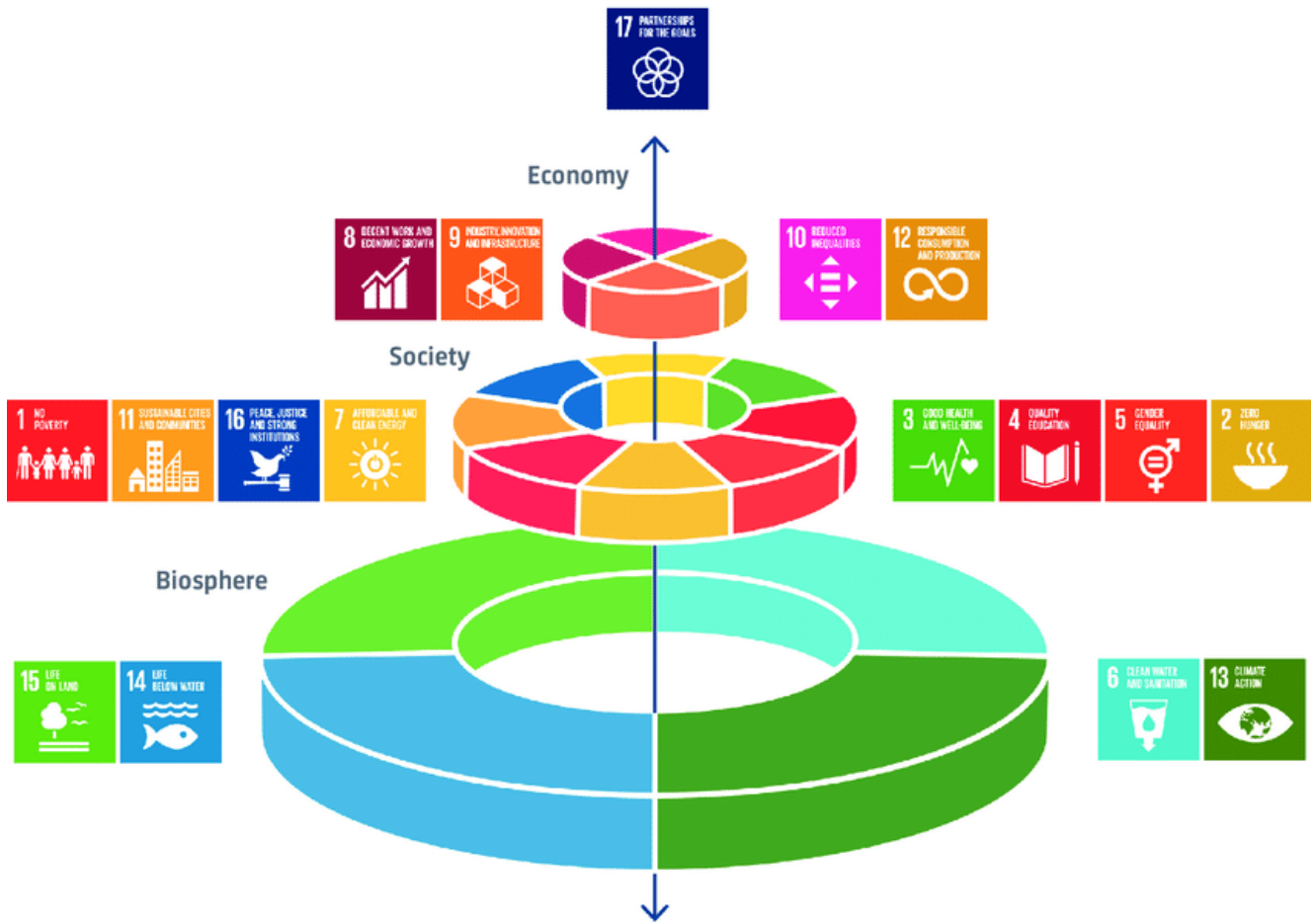
Additionally, a comprehensive public communications plan would maximise awareness, ownership and engagement of SDGs. Therefore the online presence with regards to the SDGs needs to be much more user friendly and accessible, and so **we'll be looking for details of a robust public communications strategy in the draft National Implementation Plan.**

We call on you as an elected representative to scrutinise the draft National Implementation Plan on the SDGs in light of these 7 tests, and to work for a final plan that has the potential to genuinely drive implementation of the SDGs over the coming years.



<sup>6</sup> The last National Stakeholder Forum on the SDGs was October 18th, 2019.

# Annex 1: 'Embedded Sustainability'



The SDG 'Wedding cake' shows the biosphere as the foundation of economies and societies and as the basis of all SDGs. Such a conceptualization adopts an integrated view of social, economic, and ecological development. (Source: Azote Images for Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University)

