

FROM STOCKHOLM OR RIO TO NEW YORK AND SLOVAKIA. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA - AGENDA 2030

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Abstract

2015 was a landmark year for the United Nations. Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change were adopted. 2016 is a year of the implementation of a comprehensive and universal development agenda. In March 2016 the Government of Slovakia discussed the new development Agenda 2030 which was adopted in New York in September 2015 by the heads of states and governments of 193 member states of the United Nations applicable for all countries. This agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development goals (SDGs) and 169 Targets. The Government adopted Decision N. 95/2016 which commits the ministries and other bodies of the state administration to developing strategies on implementation of Agenda 2030. The aim of this article is to describe the activities of the United Nations at the creation of sustainable development agenda following the deadline for the implementation of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015 (MDG Report, 2015). The analyses show the process of the creation of sustainable development agenda, which began with Agenda 21 and concluded with Agenda 2030. The article shows how Slovakia treated this agenda and how is ready to implement the new development agenda within the next fifteen years. The ministries and other bodies of the state administration will need to “share responsibility and commitments” emerging from the implementation of Agenda 2030.

Keywords: sustainable development, United Nations, new development agenda, Agenda 21, Agenda 2030, Sustainable Development Goals, Millennium Development Goals.

Introduction

When speaking about sustainable development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we have to hunt in the past and mention the United Nations Conferences on Environment and Development organized in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and 2012.

We have to go even farther back in history and think about how sustainable development and consequently the creation of a new, sustainable development Agenda 2030 came about. The Stockholm Conference on Environment in 1972 organized by the United Nations mainly focused on the protection of the environment. The UN Conference in Rio in 1992 adopted the Agenda for the 21st Century and was about the environment and

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development with a focus on economic, social and environmental development. In 1992 we began to use the term “sustainable development”.

The Johannesburg Conference in 2002 focused on the building partnerships for sustainable development. The Rio Conference in 2002 adopted the “Rio Declaration on Environment” and further developed the “Agenda 21”. A couple of years later we came to an important milestone – The UN Rio + 20 Conference. This conference was a break through point for the sustainable development agenda, and presented specific steps leading to the definition of Sustainable Development Goals.

The United Nations’ Summit in September 2015, also called “Post-2015 Summit”, was a culmination of the whole after-Rio preparatory process on defining the sustainable development agenda. The Summit adopted the Agenda 2030 which put on the table a complex agenda enshrined in 17 SDGs and 169 Targets.

1 Genesis of the Idea of Sustainable Development

What is “sustainable development”? The Brundtland Commission’s brief definition of sustainable development as the „ability to make development sustainable – to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, Brundtland Commission, 2005, p. 10) This definition does not mention „environment“ or „development“ but reflects the meaning of sustainable development.

The question stands: When was the idea of sustainable development born? Was it in Stockholm or in Johannesburg, or at the first Rio Conference in 1992 or the second one in 2012? All these conferences contributed to developing the ambitious new development Agenda 2030. The United Nations played an important role in the creation of the new development agenda and organized all conferences and summits leading up to Agenda 2030.

1.1 United Nations Conference on Environment in Stockholm “Stockholm Conference” - 1972

UN’s 1972 Stockholm Conference marked the beginning of the notion of “sustainable development”. Since then, such development takes into account its impact on the environment. Besides starting the discussion on environmental issues, the conference adopted the Stockholm Declaration (UNEP, 1972) with principles of development.

Based on the outcome of the Stockholm Conference, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) was established in 1972. The conference created a basis for “green” thinking.

1.2 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro - 1992

The Rio conference was organized by the United Nations in 1992, also called the “Earth Summit”. The aim of the conference was to stimulate the political will of world leaders and governments towards sustainable development. Agenda 21 (Agenda 21, Earth Summit, 1992) and Rio Declaration (Report of the UN, Annex 1 – Rio Declaration, 1992), as main outcomes of the conference, outlined the main policies for achieving sustainable development

with focus on harmony between economic development and environment. The Summit put on the table two important things – environment and development.

Apart from the Agenda 21 the Rio Declaration was also adopted at the conference which contains the principles on exploitation and the protection of environment as well as on the sustainable development of all forests. Subsequently the outcome documents from Rio were adopted by the 47th United Nations General Assembly. Agenda 21 became the core of the United Nations agenda and its committees such as Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), UNESCO, UNDP, UNEP, FAO, UNIDO and others.

For the implementation of Agenda 21, the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) has been created. The CSD had 53 members, including Slovakia. In 1996 this Commission adopted the “indicators for sustainable development” that covered economic, social and environmental development. The indicators were to be implemented and reviewed by all member states and by the UN. Totally 132 indicators were adopted. These indicators were reviewed by ministries, institutions and local governments at national levels.

1.3 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg - 2002

The UN Summit in Johannesburg, also called “Earth Summit II” as well as “Rio + 10” was organized in 2002. The aim of the Summit was to specify the process of solving global problems including steps towards better life of the growing population, taking into account an optimal exploitation of existing resources. The main topic of the conference was “Building Partnership for Sustainable Development”.

Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Summit, 2002) was the outcome of the conference. This conference had a broader agenda than the one in Rio in 1992 and focused, among other aspects, on the eradication of poverty, water quality, clean energy, health, production and consumption as well as tourism development.

1.4 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro – 2012

The United Nations Conference, also called “Rio + 20”, was organized in June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro. The Rio + 20 set up a background for new global architecture on sustainable development. The outcome document - The Future We Want (Resolution A/RES/66/288), represents a document with clear political steps and measures for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The event adopted a ground-breaking green agenda.

Governments agreed to establish an intergovernmental negotiation process for the preparation of a new development agenda including its financing. At the same time, the conference decided on the strengthening of the UNEP in many spheres of the program’s activities. The result of negotiations in Rio de Janeiro came to a decision to create a High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Goals (HLPF). The first inauguration meeting of the HLPF was in September 2013 in New York.

The HLPF replaced the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). It is a universal intergovernmental forum with political aim and serves as a platform for dialogue on the implementation of the Agenda 2030. The Forum gives space for integration of three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental dimension), and

will produce grounds for reviewing the progress made commitment fulfillment for the implementation of the new agenda. The next meeting of the HLPF will be under the auspices of the ECOSOC in July 2016. Actually it will be the first meeting after the adoption of Agenda 2030. The meeting will give a guidance for the follow-up and monitoring of SDGs.

The representatives of governments in Rio de Janeiro also adopted a ten year Program Framework on Sustainable Consumption and Production, which was elaborated and incorporated into the United Nations activities. This conference also decided on the organization of the International Conference on Small island Development States (SIDS), which took place in 2015 in Apia in Samoa. The Rio + 20 Conference recognized the importance of all relevant stakeholders and called upon governments to establish new partnerships for sustainable development.

2 The Preparations of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030

As I mentioned above, one of the main outcomes of the Rio + 20 Conference was a decision to begin an intergovernmental negotiation process on defining the Sustainable Development Goals. The conference further decided that the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs should be exceptional, easy readable, acceptable by all and cover three dimensions of development.

The United Nations played a significant role in the preparation of the new development agenda, giving a platform for discussions involving all relevant players including civil society and the private sector.

The intergovernmental negotiations for the preparation of the new development agenda, included two basic processes:

1. Negotiations of the Open Working Group for defining SDGs (OWG), which resulted in a set of 17 Goals and 169 Targets. These SDGs became part of the outcome document of the Summit on the Post-2015 Agenda in New York. The OWG worked from March 2013 till July 2014.
2. Intergovernmental Negotiations for the Preparation of the Outcome Document for the Post-2015 Summit, which resulted to an outcome document Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development (Resolution A/Res/70/1) adopted by the Summit. The negotiations lasted from October 2014 till August 2015.

The OWG was established in January 2013 based on the outcome of the Rio + 20 Conference. The group was led by two co-chairs from Hungary and Kenya. The OWG had 30 members or groups of two or three countries based on geographic assignment. The outcome of the group was a set of SDGs. The Group focused on the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector and academia.

The Intergovernmental Negotiations were led by two co-chairs (Kenya and Ireland) and were the most intensive and inclusive consultations in the history of development. The representative of all countries participated in the negotiations. Likewise the OWG, these

negotiations focused on the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. The negotiations were also member state–led by involving all important players.

The intergovernmental negotiations took into account the outcome of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development as well as the Synthesis Report of the Secretary General for the Post-2015 under the name “Road to Dignity till 2030”. The negotiations paid special attention to needs of most vulnerable countries such as Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Land Locked Developing Countries (LLDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and countries in conflict and post-conflict situations.

3 UN Summit on Post-2015 in New York - Agenda 2030

The Summit Post-2015 organized in September 2015 adopted Agenda 2030. The head of states and governments gathered in New York to give their voices to an important agenda. The event was held in the year when the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were to be met.

The SDGs were created based on the proposals, ideas of countries – members and non-members of the OWG. The SDGs are an integral part of Agenda 2030. Agenda 2030 is a complex document, unprecedented in history. The new agenda was adopted after very intensive and inclusive consultations at the United Nations where all members states participated in negotiations. Agenda 2030 will guide international development cooperation during the next fifteen years.



Figure 1. Sustainable Development Goals (Source: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?page=view&nr=1021&type=230&menu=2059>)

4 Slovakia and the Sustainable Development Agenda

Slovakia was active in the field of sustainable development and accepted Agenda 21 as well as the principles leading to sustainable development. Slovakia's government very much supported the adoption of the Rio + 20 Outcome Document as well as Agenda 21 in its Decision from 8 September 1992. It instructed its ministries and other governmental bodies to draw on the Rio documents and incorporate the outcomes in the strategic documents and the working plans of the ministries.

The Ministry of the Environment of Slovakia was in charge of Agenda 21 and sustainable development. The European Union defined a list of indicators relevant for its member states. Slovakia's Environmental Policy includes measures aimed foremost at air protection, effective water management and exploitation of natural resources, waste management, natural and country and landscape welfare and development. Based on the outcome of Agenda 21, all member states should have elaborated national and regional sustainable development strategies. Slovakia took this commitment very seriously.

4.1 Agenda 21

The Ministry of the Environment of Slovakia, in the context of achieving Agenda 21, elaborated the Strategy, Principles and Priorities of the State Environmental Policy (Uznesenie vlády č. 619/1993). The government of Slovakia adopted this document by its Decision N. 619/1993, and consequently it was adopted by the National Parliament of Slovakia.

The Measures to achieve the goals of the mentioned Strategy were incorporated in the NEAP - National Environmental Action Plan (Uznesenie vlády SR č. 350/1996) adopted by the government Decision N. 350/1996. This NEAP was followed by nine Regional Environmental Action Plans (REAP) and 79 District Environmental Action Plans (OEAP). All these documents reflect the recommendations of Agenda 21 and global development. These documents rank Slovakia among leading countries in the field of sustainable development.

In the social ambit, certain documents were adopted in Slovakia, e.g. the Strategy of Transformation of the Social Scene, Strategy of the State Family Policy, Employment Strategy, Human Resource Strategy. Except these documents many other documents were elaborated in the framework of the Health Ministry, Education and Science Ministry and Culture Ministry. In the economic sphere, many other strategies were adopted, e.g. concerning economic development policy, industry and trade development, energy, agriculture, forestry, transportation and construction, etc. In 1996 at the 5th Anniversary of the UNEP's creation the Ministry of the Environment of Slovakia presented a document which contained the goals of sustainable development.

The Government Council for Sustainable Development was established in 1996 by the members of the economic, social and environmental ministries and representatives of eight regional departments as well as representatives of relevant associations and science. The Ministry of the Environment presented each year until 2014 a Report on the Implementation of Agenda 21, so called Country Development Report (CDP), to the Sustainable

Development Department of the United Nations. In 2012 the Committee on Sustainable Development (CSD) was canceled and the HLPF was established. HLPF presented recommendations for publishing National Voluntary Presentations. At the moment, the structure and content of the national presentations are being discussed at the United Nations. The National Voluntary Presentations replace the Country Development Reports. During the forthcoming meeting of the HLPF in July 2016, the first ever National Voluntary Presentations are going to be organized by countries including Estonia, Finland, Germany, Colombia.

4.2 Review of Agenda 21 in Slovakia

In 1997 at the review of the first Quinquennial of Agenda 21 a document for achieving the “commitment” of member states to implement Agenda 21 was adopted, in a spirit of cooperation and partnership. Slovakia’s Government Decision N. 655 from 1997 concerning Agenda 21 and the Review of the indicators of sustainable development in Slovakia adopted a Proposal for the Implementation of the Agenda 21 and bound the ministries and other bodies of the state administration to review annually and publish a Report on the Implementation of the Indicators for Sustainable Development and present it to the United Nations. This task actually ended up once the HLPF was established. As mentioned above, based on this Decision a Government Council for Sustainable Development was established. The Decision also bound the Statistical Commission to include a survey on the indicators into the statistical surveys.

Once the ministries and other bodies of the state administration of Slovakia adopted the decision concerning the implementation of Agenda 21 by a new Government Decision N. 978/2001, the NSTUR - National Strategy on Sustainable Development (Decision N. 978/2001) was adopted and consequently by the National Parliament of Slovakia. The aim of this Decision was to put into effect the goals and priorities of the NSTUR in economic strategies, most importantly in the Strategy of the New Economy of Slovakia. Likewise, this Decision bound the ministries and other bodies of state administration to develop the priorities of the NSTUR within the ministries, at the Statistical Office of Slovakia, Slovak Academy of Science as well as at regional and district level.

The Statistical Office of Slovakia took over the review of the majority of indicators for sustainable development. The administration of the indicators was determined by the Act N. 347/1990 on the Organization of Ministries and other bodies of the state administration of Slovakia. Among 125 indicators applicable to Slovakia, the Ministry of the Health, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Transport and Regional Development of Slovakia are responsible for 41 social indicators. The Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of the Environment are responsible for 28 indicators. There are 49 indicators focusing on environmental issues where the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Social Affairs and Family, Ministry of the Health and the Statistical Office of Slovakia is in charge. The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development of Slovakia, Statistical Office of Slovakia as well as the Office of the Development Strategy, Science and Technics are in charge of 15 institutional indicators.

5 Agenda 2030 and Slovakia

On 1 March 2016, Agenda 2030, adopted by the world leaders in September 2015 in New York, came into force. The SDGs are integral part of Agenda 2030. They build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and aim to go further. The SDGs call all countries to act and all multistakeholders to be involved in their implementation. These new 17 SDGs apply universally to all. All countries will mobilize efforts to implement the SDGs. Slovakia will not lag behind.

The SDGs are not legally binding, nevertheless governments should take action and establish national strategies for achieving the Goals. Countries have primary responsibility to act and own the development. It is important to harmonize the three elements of development - economic, social and environmental.

In January 2016, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia presented a document - Information on Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development to the Government of Slovakia. The aim of the document is basically:

- to draw the attention of ministries and other institutions to Agenda 2030,
- to bind the ministries and other bodies of the state administration to implement the Agenda 2030.

Based on this document, the government adopted Decision N. 95/2016 which:

- commits the ministries to developing strategies on implementation of Agenda 2030,
- divides the Agenda 2030 among ministries and presents a so called “shared management framework” which breaks up the SDGs and targets between the ministries,
- demands the establishment of a Government Council for Sustainable Development or the re-establishing of one already established in 1996,
- calls upon the Statistical Office of Slovakia to develop a set of national indicators to Sustainable Development Goals.

Conclusion

In order to answer the question: Which conference played the key role for sustainable development? When was sustainable development born: I would suggest that all conferences beginning with Stockholm, continuing with Johannesburg, two Rio conferences and concluding with the Summit on Post-2015, were important and played their role in setting guidance for sustainable development.

Agenda 2030 is a transformative and integrated agenda with no equivalent in history. It means a new chapter in global development. Law and justice, human rights, gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls are important for achieving it. Without an inclusive, peaceful and safe society, Agenda 2030 will not be achieved. It is necessary to cultivate a vision of global partnership, a kind of new partnership for the implementation of the agenda by involving all relevant stakeholders including civil society, academia, science

and the private sector. Let not forget that the new development agenda is reweave with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (COP21) adopted in Paris in December 2015.

The MDGs saved lives and took millions out of poverty. Agenda 2030 is more ambitious and will do even more for people than the MDGs did. It is an action oriented agenda, a guideline for development in the 21st century. International development cooperation between the developing and developed countries is important mostly for capacity building in developing countries. Countries have their own responsibility for development. The international community stays ready to help those in need and vulnerable countries. There are many sources for helping developing countries, and at the same time it is inevitable that countries rely more on their own domestic mobilization of resources for development.

“Business as Usual” is not the case for development any more. No one will be left behind. Agenda 2030 is for rich and poor, developing and developed countries, applicable from north to south. It is an ambitious agenda where everybody needs to contribute, including the private sector. Slovakia did a lot for the implementation and review of Agenda 21, and is on the right track to successfully implement Agenda 2030.

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