SDG Watch Europe Position Paper on establishing a new EU Multi-Stakeholder Platform

1. Introduction

The EC Communication entitled *"Next steps for a sustainable European future - European action for sustainability"* published in November 2016 states that the Commission intends to establish a new EU Multi- Stakeholder Platform as part of its overall implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It states that in order to *" create a dynamic space bringing together the different stakeholders of the public and private sphere, the Commission will launch a multi-stakeholder Platform with a role in the follow-up and exchange of best practices on SDG implementation across sectors, at Member State and EU level. This Platform could act as a peer-learning hub where stakeholders can engage in debates about sustainability activities and inform others about ongoing successful initiatives"*. The members of SDG Watch Europe welcome this initiative and view it as a clear operationalisation of the 2030 Agenda's commitment to a multi-stakeholder approach as a key means of implementation.

While our alliance welcomes the announcement that a new multi-stakeholder platform is to be established, we believe that the vision for the new platform should be considerably more ambitious than that set out in the EC Communication. In fact the implementation of the 2030 Agenda provides the European Union with a unique opportunity to demonstrate leadership in the current challenging global political context. The new EU multi-stakeholder platform to be established should be a model of best practice that can inspire other regions and countries interested in initiating such platforms in the context of implementing the 2030 Agenda

SDG Watch Europe has already communicated with the office of Commission First- Vice President Timmermans, following the publication of the EC Communication last year. In an advocacy letter to the Vice President in December 2016, we clearly outlined the principles that we believe should inform the design and operation of any Multi Stakeholder Platform to be established (*see www.sdgwatcheurope.org/news*)

The purpose of this position paper is to reflect the thinking within the SDG Watch Europe alliance about how the proposed EU multi-stakeholder platform could best be operationalised. The paper identifies a range of important functions that the new platform could fulfil, and makes clear proposals about the possible composition of the platform, how representation could work, and the operational modalities that would help the platform to function effectively. The paper recognises the importance of promoting strong and effective linkages between the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the EU and MS levels. SDG Watch Europe believes that the operation of the new EU Multi-Stakeholder Platform should support and enhance such linkages.

We value the opinions and ideas of other actors and intend to disseminate this position paper as widely as possible. We hope that our paper will stimulate open creative thinking amongst other interested parties regarding the operationalization of the new multi-stakeholder platform.

This paper will address the following issues linked to the proposed Multi Stakeholder Platform: **(i)** Objectives **(ii)** Functions **(iii)** Composition **(iv)** Representation **(v)** Operational Modalities

2. Objectives of platform

The key objective of the EU Multi-Stakeholder platform is to contribute to the planning, implementation, monitoring and review of the 2030 Agenda at EU level by:

(i) Mobilising the expertise of different key sectors
(ii) Promoting innovation and best practice where sustainable development is concerned
(iii) Contributing to ensuring effective links at with stakeholders working on sustainable development at the EU Member State level

The members of SDG Watch Europe believe that this proposed platform should not be the <u>only</u> mechanism for discussion and consultation on the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. Other consultations, particularly, but not only, sectoral consultations, should continue to take place with relevant actors in addition to public consultations.

3. Functions of platform

SDG Watch Europe believes that the Multi Stakeholder Platform referred to in the recent Commission Communication should fulfil a range of different and important functions at a European level where the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is concerned. We believe that the function of the platform should be <u>broader than merely peer- learning and exchange of best practice</u>.

We envisage **nine key functions** which the multi-stakeholder platform could perform:

(i) Advising on policy issues, both internal and external
(ii) Ensuring that the key principles of the 2030 Agenda such as policy coherence for sustainable development, leave no-one behind and respect for planetary boundaries are taken fully into account in the planning, implementation monitoring, review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda.
(iii) Advising on communications and public outreach
(iv) Advising on EU budgetary policies and the future MFF
(v) Ensuring that Agenda 2030 principles and priorities are mainstreamed across the EU research agenda, and proposing appropriate research topics
(vi) Engaging in peer learning and the promotion of best practice
(vii) Advising on the monitoring and reporting of EU and MS SDG implementation
(viii) Facilitating effective and ongoing liaison with national SDG Platforms
(ix) Reflecting and Innovating on effective long-term governance for sustainable development

3.1. Advising on Policy Issues: This work would focus largely on EU mandates/competences, and support the Commission in developing a gap analysis related to its mapping exercise and generating proposals to "close" these gaps. It could also help to identify and elaborate "best practices" linked to Sustainable Development across different policy and sectoral areas. It could assess the contribution of new and revised EU policies to greater coherence across the different dimensions of sustainable development

3.2. Ensuring that the key principles of the 2030 Agenda are mainstreamed, and fully reflected in EU internal and external policies . The platform's work in this area could involve providing advice and ensuring the mainstreaming of important 2030 Agenda principles across EU policy frameworks and processes. This would particularly include policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD), the TEU obligation to policy coherence for development (PCD), and other key principles such as universality, leaving no one behind, well-being for all within planetary boundaries, integration and inter-linkages, inter-generational responsibility etc.

3.3. Advising on the promotion of the 2030 Agenda in EU Communication policy and public outreach: The platform's work in this area could involve advising on the development of an EU- wide strategy to encourage public debate, awareness and understanding of the 2030 Agenda.

3.4. Advising on EU Budget policies: This work would involve providing advice on how best to deliver the 2030 Agenda through mainstreaming it into EU budgetary policies, with a particular focus on the new EU Multi-Annual Financial Framework

3.5. Mainstreaming Agenda 2030 into the EU Research Agenda: The platform's work in this area would involve providing advice on how the EU research agenda can best contribute to the delivery of the 2030 Agenda, and also proposing and generating research ideas

3.6 Engaging in peer learning and the promotion of best practice: The platform's work in this area would involve identifying, promoting and disseminating best practices in sustainable development across the European Union

3.7. Monitoring and Reporting on EU & MS implementation of the Agenda 2030: This work would involve advising on the preparation for reporting by the EU & its member states to the UNECE & HLPF annual progress reviews, inter alia. It could also involve advising on ex- ante and ex- post impact assessments, and monitoring the contribution of new and revised EU policies to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to greater coherence across the different dimensions of sustainable development. The platform would also participate in the important work of elaborating and revising of an EU- level indicator framework for measuring progress with Agenda 2030 implementation at EU and Member State levels. It would ensure the highest standards in the measurement of progress, based on the global indicators developed by the Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDGs and UNSC, and with a level of ambition appropriate to an EU context. The platform would advise on strengthening the capacities of National Statistical Offices, bearing in mind the requirement to monitor and measure progress across all of the Agenda 2030 goals and targets, and given the commitment to full data disaggregation.

3.8. Facilitating effective and ongoing liaison with national SDG Platforms: The platform's work in this area should involve advising on the most effective ways to facilitate ongoing liaison with national Sustainable Development platforms and national 2030 Agenda processes including planning, implementation, monitoring and review.

3.9. Reflecting and innovating for effective, long term governance for sustainable development: The platform should be a key forum for reflecting on the longer-term vision of the EU and key policies beyond 2020. Its work in this area could involve reflection on how best the EU and its Members States can deliver on their commitments linked to the 2030 Agenda in EU internal and external action. The platform could elaborate proposals for appropriate EU- level structures and processes to co-ordinate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (including proposals for EU and MS level monitoring and reporting structures, accountability mechanisms, etc.) This work should involve regular transparent and accessible public consultations.

4. Composition of the Platform

4.1. The composition of the new platform should have a balanced and diversified representation of all three dimensions of sustainable development plus governance, in order to reflect the full breadth of the Sustainable Development Goals, as agreed in the adopted UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

4.2. The full diversity of stakeholders should be represented on the platform, including those recognised as major groups and other stakeholders that should be meaningfully involved in sustainable development[1]. This should include, in particular, a range of civil society organisations, community-based organisations, the private sector (including SMEs and producer-led organisations), trade unions, co-operatives, academia and research institutions, regional and local governments and groups at risk of being, or already left behind.

4.3. All stakeholder constituencies represented on the platform should be "self-organising" (ie freely nominate and put forward their own representatives as opposed to their representatives being identified by others). Stakeholder representatives should also be held accountable by their respective constituencies. Their participation in, and contribution to the platform's work should be open to public scrutiny.

4.4. The membership of the platform must be balanced gender-wise.

5. Representation on the Platform

5.1. Representatives on the platform should be linked to at least one or more of the four dimensions of sustainable development (economic, environmental, social, governance) and have a proven track record and experience working in related EU policy areas.

5.2. Representatives on the multi-stakeholder platform should work in the collective interest promoted by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and avoid the pursuit of narrow sectoral interests.

5.3. The diverse stakeholders on the multi-stakeholder platform should be in a position to contribute their expertise and to bring their strong links to grassroots constituencies to enrich the important deliberative work of the platform, in particular those with links to constituencies of poor and vulnerable people, and communities at risk of being, or already left behind, including in partner countries of the Global South.

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[1] (*See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/733FutureWeWant.pdf*)

5.4. Those stakeholders selected to participate in the platform should be familiar with European policies and policy-making processes

5.5. There should be clear selection criteria established for stakeholders to be represented on the platform and these should be published online and subject to public consultation. A call for expressions of interest should take place. Clear and transparent selection processes should be used and subsequent decisions published

5.6. Stakeholder representatives should have a two or three year mandate on the platform. Appropriate measures should be put in place to ensure that a good balance between ensuring rotation and continuity applies to the way in which stakeholders are replaced on the platform

5.7. The chair and vice chair should be elected by and amongst members

5.8. There should be an obligation on all stakeholder representatives to continuously reach out to their constituencies to collect inputs, communicate and provide feedback.

6. Operational modalities of the Platform

6.1. The multi stakeholder platform should be established for the period up to 2030 and operate continuously with overall performance reviews at two–yearly intervals.

6.2. The new EU Multi-Stakeholder platform to be established should be an independent entity, although the services of its secretariat could be provided by a relevant EU institution. The platform should be an integral part of EU formal processes while remaining independent.

6.3. The secretariat for the platform must ensure effective communication and interaction with all of the platform's representative stakeholders and their constituencies, as this will be critical to the success of the platform. The platform secretariat should be accountable to, and regularly report to, the Multi-Stakeholder Forum and to its Chair and Vice Chair.

6.4. The Platform should endeavour to take substantive decisions (e.g. on positions or recommendations) by consensus. However, if reasonable efforts at achieving consensus do not succeed, it may adopt decisions by majority. In that case, minority positions supported by at least five members of the Platform shall also be recognised and made publicly available with the same prominence as the majority position.

6.5. The platform should be a model of transparency, accountability, accessibility and participation based on best practices. Online accessibility to the work of the platform should be provided to all. Work programmes, agenda and background papers should be published in accessible formats at least one month in advance. Meetings should take place in accessible venues and reasonable accommodation should be provided for persons with disabilities. There should be live-streaming of meetings and all minutes published online. The names and email addresses of representatives should be provided online so they can be contacted by their constituencies or by others. There should be online opportunities for comment and formal feedback should subsequently be provided after consideration by platform members.

6.6. The platform should primarily serve an advisory function, providing recommendations and proposals to the EU institutions and their decision-making processes.

6.7. A multi-annual work programme that is action- oriented should be adopted by the platform at the outset, and action points agreed at each meeting with responsibilities and time schedules attached.

6.8. The multi-stakeholder platform should engage in annual reporting against its work programme and make all reports and documents publicly available

6.9. The ideal number of stakeholders that would constitute the core working group of the platform should be approximately twenty people. However a much wider number of stakeholders from local national, EU and, where appropriate, international levels should be invited to participate in the ongoing work and deliberations of the platform.

6.10. The Platform will be properly resourced in order to ensure the full participation of the representative stakeholders and their regular and effective liaison with their constituencies.

6.11.. Given that an overall objective of this platform will be to provide advice on the EU's implementation of the 2030 Agenda, its work will inevitably overlap with discussions taking place in other fora, especially given the broad scope of the SDGs. The role of the platform's secretariat therefore should include the provision of information on relevant reports and recommendations that are produced in other fora.

6.12. Once established, members of the new EU -level multi stakeholder platform should deliberate on and make proposals concerning the most effective ways to share information and engage effectively with national- level Sustainable Development platforms.

6.13. The Multi-Stakeholder Platform should have an opportunity every year to attend and to present its work to EU Council discussions, EU Council Working Groups, European Parliament Committees and Plenary meetings, and other relevant EU bodies and processes.

6.14. A high-level, formalised channel or mechanism involving all of the key EU institutions should be established (possibly linked to each EU Presidency) to allow the Multi Stakeholder Platform to provide its recommendations to the highest level of the EU institutions. This mechanism should be characterised by reciprocal or two-way communication between the EU institutions and the platform's representatives.

6.15. The platform should be provided with regular opportunities and the necessary resources to invite experts or officials to platform meetings and to commission specific inputs and reports.