



DEBATE PACK

Number CDP 2016/0080, 12 April 2016

Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

This pack has been produced ahead of the debate to be held in Westminster Hall on Wednesday 13 April 2016 at 4.30pm on the **implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals**. The Member in charge is Ben Howlett MP.

Emma Downing

Contents

1. Library Briefing	3
1.1 What are the Sustainable Development Goals?	3
Transformational challenges for all	3
Global Indicators	4
1.2 How are the goals being implemented in the UK?	5
UK Government approach	5
Devolved Administrations	7
1.3 Stakeholder ideas on implementation approaches	7
2. Useful links and further reading	9

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. Library Briefing

1.1 What are the Sustainable Development Goals?

The [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) were agreed by UN Member States at an extraordinary Summit of the UN General Assembly on the post-2015 development agenda in New York in September 2015.

World leaders, including UK Prime Minister David Cameron, attended the Summit pledging commitment to the achievement of the 17 Goals with 169 associated targets for by 2030.

The SDGs took four years to negotiate and are the successors to the 2001 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – eight goals with 18 associated targets – most of which were to be achieved by 2015. The new goals cover issues from poverty and gender equality to waste reduction and achieving sustainable consumption and production patterns. They have been broadened in scope in an attempt to integrate the UN's Sustainable Development agenda which has tended to run in parallel with little overlap.

Transformational challenges for all

The SDGs are intended to go further than the Millennium Development Goals and are designed to be a universal and comprehensive vision and framework for the evolution of *all* (developed and developing) countries. The SDGs seek to take a more holistic approach to development, addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality in order to bring transformative change that will 'leave no one behind'.

DFID Minister. Baroness Verma has said that the UK Government considers the SDGs to be a major step forward from the MDGs because of these qualities. For the UK, she confirmed that the universal spirit of the SDGs meant that "no target should be considered met unless it had "been achieved by all segments of society"¹

Despite the universal nature of the SDGs, discussions to create them did naturally focus on the problems of the developing and least developed countries and how a combination of their own efforts and renewed international co-operation and partnership could help them build on the MDGs.

However, a study in May 2015 for the UN Development Programme by [Stakeholder Forum](#) (which acts as the National Committee for the UN Environment Programme) identified three particular SDGs as being the most transformational challenges facing developed countries:²

- sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12)
- sustainable energy (SDG 7) and

¹ HL Deb 17 September 2015 c1994-1998

² Stakeholder Forum, [Universal Sustainable Development Goals: Understanding the transformational challenge for developed countries](#), May 2015

- combating climate change (SDG 13)

The SDGs are contained within a final outcome document adopted by the Summit: Transforming our World. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. (25 September 2015).

House of Commons Library Briefing, [The Sustainable Development Goals and the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#) (September 2015) provides further details about the targets and the run-up to the conference. It also explains how sustainable development policy has developed in the UK and what current mechanisms are in place to monitor it.

House of Commons Library Debate Pack 2016/0018 [Tackling HIV in Women and Girls](#), 11 April 2016 is specifically relevant to the SDG commitment to end the AIDs epidemic by 2030. The first milestones towards this goal are to reduce the number of new infections by 75% and double the number of people on antiretroviral treatment by 2020

Global Indicators

Each SDG is supported by a number of targets and draft global indicators but it is up to individual countries to decide how they will adapt these to the relevant national context.

The UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) has agreed on a global indicator framework for the SDGs which the UK Government has welcomed.

There is a dedicated UN [Sustainable Development Goals indicator](#) website.

The framework is intended to be a practical starting point with further work needed on some of the indicators. The UNSC has asked the Inter-Agency Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG – SDG) to take forward further work on the indicator framework.

The IAEG-SDG is composed of member states and includes as observers regional and international organisations and agencies. The UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) expects to contribute to the development of the SDG indicators via the relevant expert groups.³

The ONS is currently working with UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UKSSD) to [gather evidence](#) on how stakeholders in the UK think that the country should report progress on the SDGs in particular:⁴

- Which SDG targets are relevant to the UK?
- Are the draft global indicators relevant for reporting UK progress?
- Do you have, or can you suggest, any more suitable indicators for reporting UK progress?

³ HL Written Question [HL7053](#) 15 March 2016

⁴ UKSSD, [Have your say – reporting UK progress on Sustainable Development Goals](#) as viewed on 12 April 2016

- Any initiatives that you may be undertaking which will aid in the achievement of the SDGs targets?

1.2 How are the goals being implemented in the UK?

The UN Summit Outcome Document, [Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) calls on all member states to develop national strategies on the SDGs as soon as possible and to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels”. It says such reviews should draw on contributions from a wide range of stakeholders, with national parliaments supporting these processes alongside other institutions.

After the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Sustainable Development (commonly known as the Rio Earth Summit), the UK was the first nation to publish a sustainable development strategy to take the agreement forward.

The UK’s last sustainable development strategy was in March 2005, the [UK Strategy for Sustainable Development: Securing the Future](#), launched by the then Prime Minister Tony Blair with a parallel strategy for co-ordination with the Devolved Administrations. It technically remains in place today and was reaffirmed and refreshed by the Coalition Government in February 2011, with [Mainstreaming Sustainable Development – The Government’s Vision and what this means in practice](#) which set out how the UK Government was mainstreaming sustainable development.⁵

UK Government approach

DFID has been assigned the lead Department on the SDGs, and will be working with the Cabinet Office across Government to ensure a “joined-up approach to implementation” with other Government Departments leading on their respective policy areas.⁶

However, as yet the UK Government has not set out an overall action plan or strategy for meeting the SDGs. There may not be one. When asked recently in Parliamentary Questions about a co-ordinating strategy or action plan, the UK Government has consistently pointed to its manifesto as an equivalent.

For example, in March 2016 in response to a written question about whether DFID had produced a cross-departmental strategy for the UK to implement the SDGs, DFID Minister Desmond Swayne responded:⁷

...The UK Government as a whole is committed to implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Government’s manifesto sets out the plan of action for which it

⁵ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), [Mainstreaming Sustainable Development – The Government’s Vision and what this means in practice](#)”, February 2011

⁶ HC Written Question [30790](#) 17 March 2016

⁷ HC Written Question [30790](#) 17 March 2016

will be held accountable by the British people. This includes commitments relevant to each of the Goals, and it will guide our efforts to achieve them. The Global Goals are the starting point for, and will be embedded across, DFID's work.

In January 2016, Secretary of State for International Development, Justine Greening, told the [House of Commons International Development Committee](#) that:⁸

There will not be, per se, an action plan for the UK, in that the action plan we have is actually delivering on the manifesto, on which we were elected.

The Committee is currently looking at how the SDGs will, or should, be implemented by DFID and the wider UK Government.

Lead departments are to be assigned to implement each target and actions to meet the targets are to be set out in departmental plans.⁹ However, the latest set of departmental plans do not make many overt links between their work and the SDGs. However, a number of written answers have outlined work relevant to the SDGs e.g. on waste (in the UK) and water and sanitation (UK acting internationally).¹⁰ A number of stakeholders are keen to see more overt UK strategy (see section 1.3).

In September 2015, DFID Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Verma provided an overview of how the UK Government intended to approach domestic implementation of the SDGs. This was in response to the House of Lords debate on the Sustainable Development Goals (17 September 2015):¹¹

I was asked how these provisions would be implemented domestically. I think I have made it clear that, along with other countries, we will implement and comply with the SDGs domestically. Her Majesty's Government will have a co-ordinated approach, including through assigning lead departments to implement each target. In addition, we will identify interested departments. In July, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster wrote to all relevant departments asking how they would approach the implementation of the goals. We are currently considering those responses.

On 9 December 2015, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Oliver Letwin, told the House of Commons Environmental Audit Select Committee that the UK does not have very much difficulty in meeting the goals:¹²

Of course they apply to all countries. We all report on them and I have already had a series of meetings with colleagues about how

⁸ International Development Select Committee, Oral evidence: Sustainable Development Goals, [HC 337](#), 11 January 2016, Q152

⁹ HL Deb 17 September 2015, [c.1998](#)

¹⁰ See for example HC Written Question [26219](#) (Waste) 15 February 2016 and HC Written Question [31973](#) (Water and Sanitation) 30 March 2016

¹¹ HL Deb 17 September 2015, [c.1998](#)

¹² Environmental Audit Committee, Oral evidence: The Government's approach to sustainable Development inquiry, [HC 388](#), 9 December 2015, Q29

we are going to report on our performance. As a matter of fact, we don't have very much difficulty in meeting the goals...

...Certainly they are a very wide-ranging vision of sustainable development globally but we have to do much more in this country than just achieve those goals. As I said that is relatively easy for us. We are trying to do more than that. We are trying to make a contribution as a rich country, for example, to carbon reduction or indeed to marine ecology around the world through our overseas territories, which go way beyond these goals. Those were the sorts of things, the specific measures to do much more than this, which were indeed in the Conservative manifesto, and are in our plan of action and which we are carrying out.

Devolved Administrations

Sustainable Development is a devolved issue and policies, legislation and approaches have diverged greatly in the last decade. The Devolved Administrations can also participate in the UK SDG programme through the Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development.

In Wales, a key recent development is the [Wellbeing of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) which requires a range of public bodies to take a sustainable development approach.

The last Scottish Sustainable Development Strategy is from 2005, [Choosing our future: Scotland's sustainable development strategy](#). However, the 2015 [Fairer Scotland Conversation](#) consultation about inequality is linked to the SDGs and First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has said that Scotland's National Performance Framework will provide a means of reporting on progress against the SDGs.¹³

Northern Ireland's Sustainable Development Strategy was published in 2010 and the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 placed a sustainable development duty on all public authorities.

1.3 Stakeholder ideas on implementation approaches

A range of stakeholders have stressed the need for an emerging, domestic mechanism to implement the SDGs in the UK.

The [Institute for Sustainable Development](#) has highlighted that first, countries need to develop strategies to implement the SDGs in such a way as to encourage different sectors to work together because the SDGs are highly linked and cannot be implemented in isolation. For example, Goal 2 focuses on hunger and sustainable food production and also aims to promote an agricultural system that is resilient to climate change.¹⁴

¹³ Scottish Government, [Leading the way in tackling inequality](#), 19 July 2015

¹⁴ International Institute for Sustainable Development blog, [Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals at home](#), 21 September 2015

[BOND](#) (a membership organisation for NGOs in international development) has stressed that the UK's contribution is not confined to the work of DFID (although vital to achieve the goals at global level). It has highlighted that action is required across three strands with associated government and stakeholder mechanisms to co-ordinate this:¹⁵

- Delivering the SDGs domestically in the UK for all UK citizens
- Ensuring DFID in its programming and policy supports the delivery of the SDGs in its priority countries
- Ensuring that domestic action on the SDGs has a positive impact globally.

[Stakeholder Forum](#) is an international organisation which seeks to advance sustainable development. It also acts as the National Committee for the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) in the UK enhancing the participation of stakeholders in the official UN inter-governmental processes.

Stakeholder Forum has taken some initiative on implementation and set up UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development ([UKSSD](#)). This is an organisation aiming to drive ambition for sustainable development in UK Government, businesses and civil society and support organisations to deliver on and progress the implementation of the SDGs in the UK.

The initiative has nearly 30 partners now and has its first major conference on 25 April 2016.¹⁶

[PWC](#) has provided help for businesses to understand how they can contribute to the SDGs in [Make it your business: Engaging with the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (September 2015).

¹⁵ BOND, [Bringing the Sustainable Development Goals home – implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in the UK](#), September 2015

¹⁶ See www.ukssd.co.uk

2. Useful links and further reading

House of Commons International Development Committee current inquiry *Sustainable Development Goals*

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/international-development-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/sustainable-development-goals-inquiry/>

House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee *Connected world: Agreeing ambitious Sustainable Development Goals in 2015* HC452 2014/15

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmenvaud/452/452.pdf>

UNA-UK *Sustainable Development Goals: The People's Agenda* March 2016

<http://fc88ed3cf19694aeaa6c-1651f9ac4c3900acfd4b3ba79ef2a9e7.r23.cf2.rackcdn.com/UNA-UK%20SDGs%20The%20people's%20agenda.pdf>

Bond for International Development *Bringing the goals home: Implementing the SDGs in the UK* September 2015

https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource-documents/bringing_the_goals_home_implementing_the_sdgs_in_the_uk.pdf

Prime Minister's speech to the UN Sustainable Development Goals Summit 2015 28 September 2015

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-to-the-un-sustainable-development-goals-summit-2015>

DFID: *Britain backs the Global Goals for Sustainable Development* 25 September 2015

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/greening-britain-backs-the-global-goals-for-sustainable-development>

British Council: *How we support the SDGs*

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/sustainable-development-goals/our-support>

About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publically available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email hcinfo@parliament.uk.

Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).