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OUR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

**DELIVERING ON THE UN'S SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE UK**



By Jessica Toale

Fabian Special

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Fabian Special

First published 2017
ISBN 978-0-7163-4130-7

Head of editorial: Kate Murray

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication data. A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound by DG3, London, UK

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Our Shared Responsibility

Delivering on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in the UK

By Jessica Toale

About the author

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Acknowledgements

While this pamphlet is the work of one author, it would not have been possible without all the people who took the time to share their professional and political insights. In particular, I would like to thank Lord McConnell for the continual support and inspiration he provided in developing this work. His commitment to this agenda and to making the world a better place for all people is truly moving.

This pamphlet is further enhanced by all those who took the time to discuss their work and views about the SDGs in the UK including Stephen Twigg MP, Mike Kane MP, Lord Falconer, Mikaela Gavas at ODI, Kathleen Spencer-Chapman and Mariana Rudge at Bond, Lucy Richardson at Brand Legacy, Jo Evans at the ONS, Karen Jeffreys and Juliet Michaelson at NEF, and particularly Dominic White at WWF. Thank you for your time and insights.

I would like to thank our partners WWF, CPAG and McConnell International Foundation for their support and for enabling this pamphlet to appear in print.

And finally, thank you to everyone at the Fabian Society who thought this was a worthwhile issue to explore, for the ongoing editorial and organisational support, and more generally for continuing to provide a platform for members to engage in a constructive way with some of our greatest political challenges and opportunities.

The Sustainable Development Goals are an ambitious and potentially transformative framework, agreed by all of the countries in the world. They cover everything from combating poverty to addressing climate change and from creating more liveable cities to achieving gender equality. But more than one year on from their introduction, in the UK public awareness is low and government action to implement them has been slow. The government which is elected this June will need, as a matter of urgency, to signal high-level political support to ensure the goals are achieved here in the UK. This pamphlet sets out recommendations for government, the private sector, civil society and campaigners. The key recommendations for the next government include:

1. Provide leadership from the prime minister's office and Cabinet Office with support from the Department for International Development to ensure that the SDGs gain traction across government.
2. Establish a cross-departmental committee or taskforce for the SDGs and appoint a focal point in each department to ensure clear lines of responsibility and accountability.
3. Establish a national action plan which identifies priority areas for the UK, maps existing policies and frameworks that can be used as a basis for our compliance with the

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- SDGs, set out a national accountability strategy, put in place a process for review which includes involvement from civil society, private sector and other organisations.
4. Actively encourage the participation of civil society in the formulation of the national action plan and in ongoing monitoring and reporting processes, as in the ONS's indicators work.
 5. Establish a cross-departmental parliamentary scrutiny mechanism with some weight, or an independent mechanism like the Independent Commission for Aid Impact.
 6. Update relevant legislation to take account of the SDGs and international obligations, particularly the International Development (Reporting and Transparency) Act 2006.
 7. Reflect the SDGs explicitly and prominently across the 17 single departmental plans.
 8. Offer to submit a national voluntary review to the UN's High-Level Political Forum in July 2018.
 9. Establish a youth forum to identify priorities for action within the SDGs, how to address these and how to monitor progress.
 10. The devolved administrations should also establish their own strategies and mechanisms for implementing the goals and these should be integrated into the UK national action plan.

People. Planet. Prosperity. Peace. Partnership. Warm words, or a call to action? Across the world, more than 700 million people live in extreme poverty, record numbers of child refugees are on the move or stuck in basic and sometimes dangerous camps, 130 million girls don't attend secondary school, and extreme weather events destroy communities, land and lives with increasing regularity.

In the 21st century we can do more to beat these challenges, and we must.

Since the end of the Cold War, despite all the wars, corruption, bad decisions and weather extremes, there has been real progress in reducing poverty and saving lives. But not enough.

The Millennium Development Goals tried to change that – and alter the pace of change. And they did. But not everywhere, and not for everyone. They helped transform access to primary education, clean water and vaccination programmes. But they did not deal with the impact of conflict or protect the marginalised groups who were being left behind.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – the UN Global Goals – can be different. Agreed in September 2015 after four years of consultation and negotiation, they can engage every country more deeply and with more impact

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than the MDGs were ever able to do. Alongside the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on finance and the Paris climate change agreement, they represent a truly universal effort to tackle the big problems in a comprehensive way.

They link development to the environment, peacebuilding, governance and human rights; they make clear that successful economies are most likely to beat poverty; they give voice to the millions of women and girls facing violence, child marriage and exclusion from education; and they demand a new approach to responsibility and partnership.

The UK helped create this agenda, inspired the 'Leave No-one Behind' central purpose, defended goal 16 on peace and justice when it was attacked, and insisted on a systematic approach to accountability and implementation. We were clear that the new Global Goals needed national strategies, data and reporting, accountability and most of all immediate action. And we accepted that they were universal.

But since September 2015, Germany, Finland and other European states have moved far ahead of us with their governments embracing these universal global targets. Across the developing world, governments with much less capacity than the UK have taken much more action.

This timely publication from Jessica Toale calls for action to start delivering now. Her call to action should be heeded by the UK government, but it also needs to be heard in Edinburgh, Cardiff, Belfast, London and in town halls across the UK. The political opposition must give priority to holding the government to account and also target these goals where it is in power.

At the UN General Assembly in September 2015, the leaders gathered there heard young voices say loud and clear: "Do not let us down this time". They received applause.

But applause is not enough. It is time to practice what we preach.

Lord McConnell

Rt Hon Lord Jack McConnell was First Minister of Scotland 2001-07 and UK Special Representative for Peacebuilding 2008-10. He currently serves as vice president of UNICEF UK, co-chair of the APPG on the UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development and chair of the McConnell International Foundation, in addition to a number of other advisory and ambassadorial positions. He was an MSP from 1999-2011, and previously a mathematics teacher and general secretary of the Scottish Labour party.

INTRODUCTION – THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS COME TO THE WORLD AND THE UK

In 2013 I travelled to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). On my way I met a woman who worked in Virunga national park as a conservationist. Her primary role was to protect the gorilla population in the forest. She admitted, however, that her job had increasingly become focused on human development rather than simply conservation. That was because human activity had become the greatest danger to the natural environment in the park. The eastern DRC suffers extreme levels of poverty, despite the abundance of natural mineral wealth in the region. The way that communities in the forest were living and working, for example in producing charcoal, were destroying the forest habitat.

Conflict and armed militia activity in the forest also threatened the natural environment. Direct destruction was being wreaked by armed confrontations and the use of the forest for shelter. At the same time, trade in bush meat and other commodities found in the forest was being used to fund the militias' activities. When the conservationist talked of her stakeholders, they included these armed groups. She would have been one of the few Europeans to actively engage with the militia groups. Her work demonstrated the close and

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growing connection between social and economic development, environmental protection and peace.

This connection is reflected in the UN's new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which it contains. For sustainable development is about making progress on a number of different, but interlinked challenges that touch the lives of everyone across the globe.

The 2030 Agenda was adopted by heads of state and governments in September 2015. It represents the culmination of years of consultation and negotiations to determine what would follow the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) after they reached the end of their life. This new framework has been designed to celebrate the successes of the MDGs, address any unfinished business and present a more ambitious and transformative vision for a better, more inclusive and sustainable world.

Contained within the 2030 Agenda are 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 targets – and an impressive 230 indicators – which cover all areas of sustainable development from poverty and inequality to consumption and production, and health, education, climate change and governance. The SDGs came into effect on 1 January 2016, and like the MDGs are expected to guide international development policy and practices over the next 15 years.

The SDGs are different from the MDGs in two very fundamental ways. Firstly, they are designed to 'leave no one behind'. The MDGs called for a proportional reduction in many of the issues they covered, for instance reducing extreme poverty by half or maternal mortality by 75 per cent. The unintended consequence of this approach was that governments often failed to achieve progress in the most marginalised communities and targeted easy to reach groups instead.

The Sustainable Development Goals

The SDGs are a set of 17 goals which call on governments around the world to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all by 2030:

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all

Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Goal 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all

Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and between countries

Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources

Goal 15: Sustainably use forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss

Goal 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies

Goal 17: Revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

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Secondly, the SDGs have been designed with the principle of ‘universality’ at their core. This is truly radical. It means that all countries – whether developing or so-called developed – have a responsibility to achieve the goals. The aim is to break down the old divisions between developed and developing countries and encourage all countries to accelerate their journey towards sustainable development.

As a developed country and major international donor, the UK has three main roles in helping to achieve the goals:

- Helping developing countries to achieve the goals through both diplomatic activity and development policy and programming
- Working to achieve the goals domestically
- Working to ensure that UK action on the SDGs domestically supports sustainable development globally

This pamphlet is focused on what the UK is doing domestically to achieve the goals, as opposed to its work to help achieve the goals overseas. It will consider where we are now, where we need to go and how we can make progress against the goals. It also makes recommendations about how to raise awareness of the goals, how the government should organise itself to implement the goals, and the opportunity civil society, the private sector and political organisations have to use this framework as a tool to empower citizens to create change in their communities.

Despite this pamphlet’s focus on the UK national government, it also recognises the responsibility of government at all levels, including the devolved administrations and local government, to implement strategies, set budgets and monitor progress against the goals. It is a call to all political parties, at all levels of government, to take the agenda seriously and step up their role in holding government to

account for its commitments. This is particularly important as parties formulate their manifestos ahead of the general election in June. The 2030 Agenda is a 15-year plan and will be relevant to whoever assumes power in the years to come.

The SDGs are an ambitious and potentially transformative framework designed to articulate a vision for the type of world we want to build collectively. They resonate strongly with progressive values and provide an opportunity to transform the UK socially, economically and environmentally. They are a set of goals agreed by every country in the world, including our own. They are an opportunity to bring together in partnership different stakeholders and find joint solutions to highly interdependent issues. We all can and should be playing a prominent role in ensuring that we achieve them.

1: WHERE WE ARE NOW – THE CHALLENGE OF AWARENESS AND IMPLEMENTATION

More than one year on from the introduction of the SDGs, public awareness of their existence is low and government action to implement them has been slow.

The SDGs are complex, but every country has a responsibility to introduce a national action plan and “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels.”¹ Twenty-two countries, including the Finland, France, Norway and Germany, voluntarily reported against their progress at the UN’s High-level Political Forum (HLPF) last year, and many more have begun to consider how the goals are applicable in their own countries and to implement structures and processes to deliver them. Unfortunately, the outgoing UK government has taken little concrete action to demonstrate how it will implement the goals at home.

Government (in)action

In March this year, the government released a publication outlining its approach to delivering the goals at home and abroad.² But until this point the government had failed to confirm plans to implement a national action plan, had offered no clear lines of accountability and had continued to insist that

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its manifesto and 17 single departmental plans were a full response.

Back in September 2016 Stephen Twigg MP, chair of the international development select committee which ran an inquiry into the UK's implementation of the goals, said the government's response to its calls for an action plan was "disappointing".³ When questioned at a committee hearing, former Secretary of State for International Development Justine Greening MP said: "The action plan we have is actually delivering on the manifesto, on which we were elected"⁴. Similarly, the government's response to the committee's report stated: "[The government] disagrees that each single departmental plan should be urgently reviewed with the specific references to the goals by number" because they already reflected the commitments made in the manifesto.⁵

Since then the Secretary of State for International Development Priti Patel MP has elaborated further on how the UK government will implement the goals. Disappointingly however, she confirmed only that "the goals should not require a new coordinating mechanism",⁶ and that DFID would retain policy oversight of the goals working with the Cabinet Office playing a role in coordinating domestic delivery through the single departmental plan process.

When it finally did set out its approach this March, the government's plan was far from a comprehensive national action plan. Instead it largely documented what it was already doing insofar as existing actions related to the various goals. While important and high-profile work to tackle issues like modern slavery and child obesity in the UK is highlighted, the document did not relate to the UN targets and did not address some of the serious regressions in the UK. In addition, there was no reference to stakeholders being part of the solution.

The government's attitude is summed up neatly in former Cabinet Office minister Oliver Letwin MP's appearance at the environmental audit committee's oral evidence session on the SDGs. He responded to a question about the government's approach to sustainable development by saying: "We don't have very much difficulty in meeting the goals...our compliance with these goals is the easy bit. The difficult bit is to get the rest of the world to be in a position to comply."⁷

The tragedy of this stance is two-fold. First, the UK played a prominent role in the formulation of the goals. David Cameron was one of the co-chairs of the UN Secretary General-appointed High-level Panel in 2012 and fought hard for the inclusion of a goal on governance and institutions. However, at various points in the negotiation phase the government was understood to oppose the inclusion of a goal on inequality, raising questions about whether the UK has fully come to terms with the 'universal' aspects of the goals. Second, it has consistently overestimated how well developed the UK is and has underestimated how interdependent we are with other countries' development.

There are signs of hope. In March this year, Theresa May responded to an open letter from 80 businesses calling on the government to demonstrate a commitment to delivering the SDGs in the UK and to work with business and other stakeholder to develop a delivery plan.⁸ She acknowledged their important role in delivering the SDGs.⁹

The environmental audit committee has just published a report on the domestic implementation of the goals and the women and equalities select committee has published a report on goal 5 and gender equality in the UK. The latter showed concern that the government had not yet set out a clear strategic plan and called for more cross-government working and clear lines of responsibility for delivering on the goals.¹⁰ Further select committees have been encouraged to

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look at the goals in their area of work. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) has also been leading on work to determine how we might monitor and report against the targets and indicators that are relevant to the UK.

The government, however, has been largely focused on what it can do to support other countries reach the SDGs through DFID and its UK aid commitments. It has been failing on domestic implementation and policy coherence – and specifically how we examine our policies and practices across government to promote sustainable development globally. We risk losing our global leadership on this agenda. It is also a missed opportunity to tackle some of our greatest challenges coherently.

Lack of public awareness

The government's lack of strategic focus on the domestic implementation of the SDGs makes the public's role in driving accountability for delivering against the goals even more crucial. However, this itself presents a number of challenges.

Awareness is low amongst major domestic organisations whose core activities map closely to the aims of the SDGs. Major public awareness campaigns thus far have had very limited impact. There has not yet been a major Make Poverty History, Live8, or Jubilee Debt Campaign moment for the SDGs despite a commitment to make the SDGs 'famous' in the first seven days after their adoption.¹¹

There are a number of factors which contribute to a lack of public awareness of the SDGs. First, they are complex: 17 goals, with 69 targets and 230 indicators. They are interlinked commitments. They require coordinated action amongst a variety of different interest groups and government departments which may not be used to working together.

Simplifying the message has been a key focus of many discussions. Initially David Cameron called for a maximum of 10 goals. The former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon fashioned his messaging around the '5Ps' – people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. This has been repeated by his successors. The New Economics Foundation has suggested five headline goals which map closely to the ONS's well-being study and which resonate with the issues that people find most relevant to their lives.¹²

Second, there is a challenge of ownership when it comes to domestic implementation. The government departments which look after domestic policy issues had very little, if any, involvement in negotiating the goals at the UN. This was the responsibility of DFID, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and at times the prime minister's office. Since the goals were agreed, we have also had a change of prime minister and cabinet team. Few of the new ministers were involved in the negotiations and as a result may lack a full appreciation of the relevance of – or a sense of ownership of – the 2030 Agenda. We should expect more change after the general election as well. Similarly, civil society organisations which were involved in negotiating the goals are often distinct from the organisations which deal with UK domestic issues and are therefore responsible for driving and monitoring progress against the goals in the UK. Many involved in the negotiation phase are also experiencing organisational fatigue after the four-year process, just at the time when the hard work on implementation needs to begin.

Then there is the distinct challenge of the post-Brexit political environment. Not only is nearly all political bandwidth taken up by arguing and understanding the consequences of triggering Article 50, but the public has also become more sceptical of elites and multilateral organisations. The erosion of trust in the effectiveness of international institutions, and

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in politicians' promises and the initiatives they promote have increasingly become the norm. Communities are often wary of goals imposed from above, and this feeling may well be heightened in the current context. Experience from community engagement around the world suggests that there is a danger that by overstating goals we create resistance amongst the public.

Finally, change happens in times of optimism. This is a time of great pessimism in the UK. We have been living through an era of economic austerity, divisive political campaigning, increasing inequality and a growing sense that we are not becoming better off. As a result, our overseas engagements are viewed with scepticism, there is hostility and distrust towards our aid and development budget and little belief that political institutions are accountable. This environment will surely have an impact on how the SDGs are viewed and our ability to effect meaningful change both in the UK and overseas.

Yet the global imperative for action is clear – increasing global instability, unprecedented refugee flows, stretched aid budgets and stresses on the institutions and norms of both global and domestic governance. In these challenging times, the 2030 Agenda, which has at its core cooperation and partnership, is all the more important.

By embracing the full potential of the goals, we can start to take on some of the challenges globally and in the UK.

2: WHY THE SDGs MATTER IN THE UK

It might be tempting to believe that the SDGs are just another UN initiative with no relevance to the UK beyond our international development department. However, the ambition of the SDGs means that even the most developed countries will need to take significant action. At the UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UKSSD)¹³ conference in April 2016, Jeffrey Sachs, director of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network and the Earth Institute at Columbia University, made the point that in the context of the SDGs all countries are developing countries. An OECD paper also outlined the scale of the challenge stating that “even the best performing countries by today’s standards will need to strive for significant improvements over the next 15 years.”¹⁴

The universality of the SDGs agenda is crucial. While the UK’s leadership on international development and action to support developing countries remains important, the UK has two additional roles in delivering the SDGs. These are:

- taking joined-up action to meet them domestically
- policy coherence to ensure that domestic legislation supports sustainable development globally, specifically through the UK’s actions to address global issues like anti-corruption, tax evasion, child exploitation

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and modern slavery, sustainable procurement, climate change, biodiversity protection and intellectual property.

These two obligations will require a shift in attitude here in the UK. But they offer us an opportunity both to radically transform our economy and society into a more sustainable one and to enhance our global impact through a demonstrable commitment to leadership and accountability at home.

The challenges and the opportunities for the UK

As a developed, high-income economy, the UK is consistently amongst the top performers on many global development indices. So do we really need to be concerned about the UK's performance domestically? The answer is yes. And while it is true that not all targets contained within the goals will be relevant to the UK, some certainly will. The much-expanded remit of the SDGs looks beyond the issues contained within the MDGs to many of the interrelated social, environmental and economic issues which affect all countries. Trajectory is important. Government cuts to basic services, the challenges we face with rising inequality, and the impact of climate change and globalisation all mean that the UK looks likely to fall short on many of the goals and targets on its current path.

The UK's performance on the goals has been assessed in a number of recent reports and appraisals:

- According to the OECD, the UK ranks 15th out of the 34 countries assessed. In particular our performance on renewable energy, income inequality, sustainable agriculture and obesity have been highlighted as areas which require serious attention.
- The recently released SDG index¹⁵, prepared by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (UNSDSN), ranks the UK 10th globally, at 78.1 per cent compliant

with all of the goals. On this index, the UK ranks poorly on indicators relating to adult obesity (28.1 per cent of adults); gender wage gap (17 per cent); women in parliament (29.4 per cent); renewable energy in final consumption (4.5 per cent); NEETs (14.4 per cent); the Gini equality index (36); Palma ratio of inequality (1.4); CO2 emissions from energy (7.1 tCO₂/capita); fish stocks overexploited or collapsed (70.8 per cent); Red List Index of species survival (0.8); annual change in forest area (8.7 per cent); and prison population (147/100,000).

- The Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future has looked across the goals and targets and identified those that will be most challenging for developed countries, based on criteria of applicability, implementability and transformational impact, using the UK as a proxy.¹⁶ Based on this scoring all of the goals involved pose significant challenges for the UK, but particularly climate change, sustainable energy, consumption and production patterns, marine conservation and inequality.
- A UN Economic and Social Council report¹⁷ expressed concern over the UK's adherence to its international obligations, which map closely to the SDGs. Inequality and poverty are a particular concern, with the report highlighting the UK's unemployment rates, tax changes, the high cost of childcare, the increased risk of poverty for marginalised people, reliance on food banks, and increases in homelessness. Other issues identified in the report include a lack of resources for mental health, inequality in educational attainment, the loss of rights through legal aid reforms, the Trade Union Bill, and the potential loss of the Human Rights Act, as well as the under-representation of women in decision-making.

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To make progress in any of these areas where the UK is currently falling short would, of course, require significant policy interventions by the next UK government.

So while the initiatives outlined in the government's recent Agenda 2030 approach document are welcome and will go some way to helping the UK achieve the goals, it is clear that the direction of travel so far will not allow us to make sufficient progress. Indeed in some areas, the government has been actively taking us backwards. There is a growing chasm between what the last government was signed up to in the SDGs and the policies it has actually been pursuing. The next section of this pamphlet will explore some of the areas where the UK will need to step up and take action to improve the lives of our citizens. It will also highlight the opportunities we have to accelerate our progress towards sustainable development.

Poverty and inequality

Poverty reduction is arguably the headline goal of the SDGs. Reducing poverty by half was the first goal of the MDGs, and this ambition has been raised in the SDGs to a commitment to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030.

Under this goal, target 1.2 sets a commitment to reducing, by at least half, the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions. This is a challenge in the UK. There were 13.5 million people living in poverty in the UK in 2014/15, and this number is up 300,000 from the previous year.¹⁸ Child poverty also rose by 200,000 in 2014/15: the first increase since 2006. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation some 1.25 million people, including over 300,000 children, experienced destitution – defined as not being able

to “afford to buy the essentials to eat, stay warm and dry, and keep clean”.¹⁹

Poverty in the UK is no longer the preserve of the jobless. The households below average income statistics for 2014/15,²⁰ also revealed that 66 per cent of families living in poverty have at least one adult in work. Organisations like the Institute for Fiscal Studies²¹ and the Resolution Foundation²² have predicted that UK child poverty is set to rise by 50 per cent or more by 2020. Welfare cuts, sanctions and the high cost of living have actively pushed people into poverty, forcing families to find desperate ways of meeting their everyday needs.

Inequality has gained in prominence as a development issue over the past 15 years. High-profile campaigns like Oxfam’s, which announced this year at Davos that just eight people own the same wealth as half of the world’s population,²³ have raised awareness of global inequality and its impacts. Politicians from across the political spectrum in the UK have come to recognise the pernicious effects of inequality. Yet the UK is one of the most unequal countries in Europe.

Goal 10 and goal 5 of the SDGs focus on tackling inequality and gender inequality, respectively. In both of these the UK has work to do. Target 10.1 urges that by 2030 all countries should progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average. Currently the UK is the 6th most unequal country in terms of income of the 30 OECD countries, and the third most unequal in Europe.²⁴ Other targets within this goal propose specific policy areas for attention to help advance equality within and between countries. For instance, target 10.4 urges countries to adopt policies to progressively achieve greater equality.

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On gender equality specifically, target 5.5 aims to secure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in public life. While we have made great strides, the proportion of women in parliament and in the top jobs remains woefully low. Women make up less than a third of parliament – a figure that is lower than 46 other countries including Rwanda, which tops the table at 61.3 per cent.²⁵ The gender pay gap also remains an issue in the UK. Despite the introduction of the Equal Pay Act in 1970, the current pay gap between men and women in full-time work is 13.9 per cent.²⁶ It is almost as if women in work last year effectively worked for free from 10 November to the end of December.

The social and economic benefits of tackling poverty and inequality have been widely documented. Following the SDGs' plan to reduce poverty and inequality in the UK could have the effect of increasing productivity and GDP, improving educational outcomes and creating a less divided, more harmonious society.

Health and malnutrition

Goal 3 of the SDGs calls for a healthy life for all. This is complemented by goal 2 on eradicating hunger.

Although extreme hunger is uncommon in most developed countries, the UK has in recent years seen an increase in the use of food banks and in various forms of malnutrition. This disproportionately affects the most marginalised and poorest groups in society. The use of food banks is at record high, rising 2 per cent on the previous year, according to the Trussell Trust.²⁷ In 2015/16, 1.1m three-day emergency food supplies were provided to people in crisis. Benefit delays and changes remain the biggest drivers of food bank use.

The Office for National Statistics has reported that 3,352 people who have died since 2005 had malnutrition or the effects of hunger mentioned on their death certificates²⁸ – with the figure 47 per cent higher in 2014 than it was in 2005. The national child measurement programme for England last year showed that 6,367 children started reception class underweight – up 16 per cent on 2012 figures – and 7,663 children started their final year of primary school underweight – up 15 per cent on 2012.²⁹ House of Commons library analysis of the most recent data suggested that more than half a million under-fives were anaemic in 2011, the highest level in 20 years.³⁰

Then there is obesity, which constitutes a growing malnutrition challenge in countries around the world. The UK has the third highest rate of excess weight in western Europe behind Iceland and Malta, with 67 per cent of men and 57 per cent of women in the UK falling into the official categories of overweight or obese.³¹ Obesity and other lifestyle-related health issues have been the focus of high-profile campaigns in the UK. So too has better access to treatment for mental health. Target 3.4 calls for countries to reduce by one-third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being. About 15 million people in England have a long-term condition such as diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, arthritis and hypertension. Whilst these conditions are most prevalent in older people, they are also found more often in more deprived groups in the UK than in the wider population.³² This is another manifestation of inequality.

SDG 3 also contains targets on strengthening the prevention and treatment of substance abuse and harmful use of alcohol; for halving deaths and injuries from road traffic

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accidents; and for a reduction in deaths and injuries from hazardous chemicals and pollution.

Health care services in the UK, although stretched, are in place, but these additional challenges require a rethink of existing policies. Major changes to the way our health system addresses prevention and addresses public health challenges will be necessary, particularly as these issues disproportionately affect poorer and more marginalised groups.

Sustainable consumption and production, energy, climate change, biodiversity

The goals and targets that relate to climate change, access to affordable, reliable, sustainable energy, sustainable production and consumption, and biodiversity are regularly cited as areas in which developed countries perform poorly. These goals reflect the enhanced emphasis on environmental and social goals in the SDGs and in many ways reflect the necessity of greater international collaboration.

The Stakeholder Forum recognises that these goals are particularly challenging for developed countries. It says: "Developed countries have a particular responsibility to transform their own economies to a more sustainable pattern so as to reduce the pressure their demands make on limited or finite global resources and the load they impose on the world through waste production, pollution, greenhouse gas emissions as well as the outsourcing of unsustainable activities such as traditional production methods to developing countries."³³ Similarly the New Economics Foundation recognises that the UK will have to confront the "deeply entrenched tendency in UK politics to prioritise economic growth over other goals, and therefore to deprioritise social and environmental goals".³⁴ The social and environmental

must be given equal consideration as the economic, for truly sustainable development.

Goal 12 of the SDGs, on sustainable consumption and production, presents a number of challenges to developed countries. It covers a wide range of resource management issues such as food waste, water and energy, as well as public procurement processes and sustainable business practices for companies. Developed countries in particular are required to take a lead on implementing the UN Environmental Programme's (UNEP) 10-year framework on sustainable consumption and production. The UK's national focal point for this framework is in DEFRA.

UK industry has long been a leader on sustainable practice, including such areas as sustainable procurement, environmental regulations and anti-slavery measures. These measures are effective at shifting global supply chain requirements and in setting global best practice. The targets in goal 12 should be seen as an opportunity to accelerate the exploration of areas where we can have greater impact. They will provide the chance to look at the long-term benefits of sustainable business, including the introduction of more cost-effective technologies, a reduction in the use of materials and greater consumer and community engagement to improve environmental, social and financial sustainability.

Goal 7 focuses specifically on transforming energy systems to provide clean, modern and sustainable energy at affordable prices. Targets 7.2 and 7.3 relate to the development of renewable energy and the phasing out of fossil fuels, and the promotion of energy efficiency. These should be key features of developed countries' sustainable development and jobs strategies. The potential for industrial transformation and job creation is immense. Already the UK has seen stagnation in the number of new oil and gas jobs and a resulting shift

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of these professionals into the renewable energy and smart energy sector.³⁵

While the UK has made progress in these areas, more needs to be done. In October 2016 the UK had dropped to an all-time low on Ernst & Young's renewable energy country attractiveness index as a result of Brexit uncertainty and the abolition of the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC).³⁶ While the government insists that we are on track to deliver 35 per cent of our electricity from renewables by 2020–21, in 2015, renewable energy only provisionally accounted for 8.3 per cent of final UK energy consumption, as measured using the 2009 renewable energy directive methodology, an increase of just 1.2 per cent on 2014.³⁷

Reductions in subsidies have affected jobs, particularly in Scotland. A recent report from the Scottish parliament's economy, jobs and fair work committee criticised the UK government for an attack on the renewable energy industry and for holding back Scotland's ambitions to be a leading low-carbon economy. Theresa May's decision to scrap DECC is a worrying development as it de-links energy from climate consideration and pits it firmly back in the arena of international business and trade.

Goal 8 covers sustained and sustainable economic growth, full, productive employment and decent work. Target 8.4 is on improving global resource efficiency in consumption and production and decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation. This target demonstrates, like goal 12, the highly global nature of the goals and the level of inter-governmental cooperation which will be needed to address them. A number of targets focus on job creation, employment, equality and rights (targets 8.3, 8.5, 8.6 and 8.8 respectively). As an increasing proportion of the workforce becomes self-employed, efforts will need to be made to ensure that these workers enjoy the same kinds of protec-

tions as those in more traditional forms of employment. This is particularly interesting in the context of the Brexit debate and the impact of leaving the EU not only on growth but on legislation protecting workers' rights. The spread of technology and its impact on employment will also be something that countries like the UK will have to monitor seriously if they are to adequately meet and address the issues contained within some of these targets.

Target 9.4 calls on all countries to upgrade their infrastructure and to retrofit their industries to make them sustainable by 2030, with increased efficiency in the use of resources and greater adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial processes. This has a particular relevance. The UK has much work to do in investing in and developing its infrastructure and industries – transport, housing and energy in particular – to meet sustainability requirements over the next generation. Debates about the third runway at Heathrow, HS2, and Hinkley Point nuclear facility demonstrate the long-lead in times and various financial and social considerations for infrastructure investments. The Scotland's Way Ahead³⁸ project has at its heart a belief in the benefits of low-carbon infrastructure and the risks of continuing to invest in high-carbon projects. This could be used as a model for other nations and regions in the UK.

The abolition of both DECC and the Sustainable Development Commission bring real challenges in meeting target 13.2 on integrating climate change measures into national policies and strategies and target 13.3 on improving education, awareness and capacity on climate change. The UK was a world leader when it introduced the 2008 Climate Change Act, but now is falling behind other countries that were quick to adopt the Paris Agreement. Theresa May appointed a number of climate sceptics to her cabinet and has a poor voting record on climate change issues.³⁹ She also

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failed to ratify the Paris Agreement before its implementation date in early November 2016.

The UK is vulnerable in many ways to the impacts of climate change, not least in the floods we have seen across the country. It is extremely important that civil society, private sector and political opposition continue to challenge climate scepticism and do not allow the UK's leadership to backslide on this issue. The government needs to have a joined-up approach to energy, climate and consumption which recognises that developed countries have much to do to make our societies and industries more sustainable and resilient to climate change.

Governance and justice

Goal 16 focuses on fostering peaceful, inclusive and just societies. This wide-ranging goal brings together a diverse set of issues and stakeholder groups. Targets include ending violence against children, fostering responsive and inclusive institutions, promoting human rights, combating transnational issues like illicit financial flows and arms dealing, and ensuring birth registration and access to information.

During the international negotiations, there was widespread scepticism about the inclusion of this goal, and specifically about whether targets could ever be effectively monitored and implemented. The UK government fought hard for its inclusion, yet it has since seemed to be weakening, and even actively going back on these ambitions.

In this area, there have been a number of worrying developments. Cuts to legal aid have had a number of pernicious effects including forcing victims of domestic violence to confront their abusers in court. The Transparency of Lobbying Act – known as the “gagging bill” – was opposed by charities for curtailing their ability to campaign on

crucial election issues. The government debated repealing the Human Rights Act and took measures to water down the Freedom of Information Act. Last year's Trade Union Bill actively sets out to dismantle trade union collective bargaining powers and disproportionately affect Labour party funding. Furthermore, the UK has also been condemned by the United Nations for its use of taser guns, rubber bullets and 'stop and search' on children – with the former being up 38 per cent between 2012 and 2013.⁴⁰

The UN has criticised the UK's moves to replace the Human Rights Act stating: "The committee recommends once again that the government adopt a national human rights plan of action which includes specific programmes regarding the realisation of economic, social, and cultural rights. It also encourages the government to consult widely with civil society and national human rights institutions in the preparation of the national human rights plan of action..."⁴¹

Despite great fanfare about addressing corruption, tax evasion and illicit financial flows, Britain's credibility has been damaged by ongoing concerns about the lack of transparency in British-controlled tax havens, the role of the City of London and the conduct of UK companies overseas and the dropping of significant proposals that would have placed personal responsibility on bankers for money laundering failings. The UK's relationship with leaders in countries with known corruption problems has also made headlines. This is an area that clearly demonstrates that British legislation and action at home has a massive global impact.

At the same time, we face serious challenges to our democracy. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's democracy index, popular confidence in political institutions and parties in developed countries continues to decline, leading to growing support for populist parties.⁴² In the UK, voter turnout in general elections, whilst recovering, has been at

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historic lows since 2001, and a government initiative ahead of the last general election in 2015 effectively wiped an estimated 1.4 million people from the electoral register. There is a reluctance to debate issues which could potentially expand engagement including extending the voting age to 16 and 17-year-olds and introducing electronic voting.

Finally, the UK is also directly affected by conflict, violence and instability in other areas of the world, most viscerally demonstrated by the impact the refugee crisis is having on the country. Here, as elsewhere, the UK needs to show leadership in tackling some of our greatest governance challenges globally.

Looking at the whole

In isolation all of these issues – poverty, inequality, health, sustainable consumption and production, energy, climate change, governance and justice – can fail to register deeply in the public consciousness. They require attention from a variety of different stakeholder groups and are often issues which are considered in silos. Collectively, however, they paint a picture of a government with so much more to do to support the rights of its citizens and deliver a more equitable and sustainable society. The SDGs are born out of a vision of such a society and present a framework for action.

Delivering the SDGs, abroad as in the UK, is an opportunity to transform our economy and society and put us on a more sustainable path. An opportunity to ensure all people are reaching their full potential and living healthy, fulfilling lives. It will require strong national leadership and ownership; partnerships between government, the private sector, civil society, academics and other stakeholder groups; innovative strategies; and a country-specific plan.

Two major shifts need to take place in order to set the UK on a course that makes it more likely we can the goals – a shift in mentality and a shift in institutions. On the first, while the UK government made some steps in the right direction, there were few signs that it intended to take its role as an implementer seriously. The next government should do so. As the New Economics Foundation points out, government has failed to recognise the scale of the challenge, the imperative for action across a variety of issues and in general has a tendency to prioritise economic goals over others.⁴³

On the second, the role of civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders will be crucial in raising awareness, implementing change and holding the government to account. This agenda needs to filter down to national and local stakeholders. They are on the frontline, in both experiencing the challenges to sustainable development and in delivering change. They need to feel empowered by the SDGs and confident to use them to drive domestic change. The universality of the framework should encourage us to think hard about how to empower vulnerable people in the UK and actively create a more sustainable society.

3: GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY: TIME FOR A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

As we have seen, the UK is a long way from achieving many of the targets contained within the goals and serious policy change will be needed if it is to do so. The government's most recent publication merely documented examples of what we are already doing, rather than examining how we are performing, understanding the challenges ahead and setting out a vision and plan for what we need to do in future.

It is in the business of government itself that we need to start. The government has the prime responsibility for creating the enabling conditions to make progress on the SDGs. It needs to encourage inter-departmental communication and engagement. Little progress has been made on this thus far. It is a wide-ranging and ambitious ask for government departments, which in general have a poor track record of joined-up working.

But for the goals to work, departments will need to work together in innovative and collaborative ways. In particular we will need:

- Political leadership and an overarching strategy including a review of existing policies and activities and the integration of SDGs into national policy frameworks.
- Implementation mechanisms that promote coordinated cross-departmental lines of accountability and action.

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- Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that track progress, provide scrutiny and report against national targets, indicators and assessment methods.

A number of organisations have looked at what the UK should be doing to deliver the goals domestically. Many have set out recommendations for how the UK should set strategy, structure its departments, and introduce accountability mechanisms to achieve the SDGs. Particular suggestions have been made, for example, by Bond Beyond 2015 UK Group⁴⁴, part of the umbrella group for international NGOs in the UK, and the international development select committee.⁴⁵ Many countries have also already been working to implement the new agenda and integrate the SDGs into their strategic planning processes. The UK can learn a great deal from them. As it stands, the UK – a country that showed such leadership in the negotiation phase – is now lagging behind other countries in their approach to the goals. It can turn this around and be the leading, outward facing country it aims to be.

High-level political leadership and strategy

Strong national-level political leadership will be crucial in implementing the SDGs. Such leadership creates ownership at national and local levels, ensures institutions proactively translate the global agenda into strategies and actions, ensures financial commitments are made, and creates the conditions for greater cross-departmental working.

Commitment from the top can be expressed in a number of ways, whether through high-level speeches, such as Angela Merkel's address to the German Bundestag or President Obama's speech at the UN, or through new national development strategies or the adaptation of existing ones. Many

countries have adopted this approach. National sustainable development strategies which emerged from the Rio Earth Summit (Agenda 21) in 1992 have often been used as the preferred starting point for the SDGs.⁴⁶

Although the UK government under David Cameron played a leading role in the negotiation phase of the SDGs, it was unclear who would be responsible for driving the implementation phase. Much of the work was left to former Secretary of State for International Development, Justine Greening. Under the next government, doubts over who will be the driving force for SDGs are likely to increase, particularly if, as expected, the focus remains on negotiating and delivering a Brexit deal. Leaving the implementation phase to the DFID, with some support from the Cabinet Office, is insufficient for the scale of the domestic challenge and would unnecessarily draw DFID away from its core mission.

So the UK needs to make clear where responsibility for driving the SDGs forward lies. It also needs a unifying strategy that brings together domestic and international commitments and makes it clear how the government will deliver against its targets. The government's recent approach paper did not do this. At present the UK has a set of 17 single departmental plans, which, with the exception of DFID's and the Foreign Office's plans, make no explicit reference to the SDGs. There is no single central document or body responsible.

A number of models have been suggested. In its report, the international development select committee expressed scepticism that responsibility for domestic implementation should come from DFID. It did however support a Cabinet Office leadership role in ensuring "all secretaries of state and government officials engage with the SDGs and fully understand the implications of the goals on their department's policies and programming."⁴⁷ This would ensure ownership

and clear lines of accountability. Bond⁴⁸ and the environmental audit committee (EAC)⁴⁹ suggest leadership needs to come from the prime minister and Cabinet Office to ensure a coherent approach from all departments.

The role of the Treasury has been considered by many, with suggestions that political leadership should come from a joint grouping of the prime minister, Cabinet Office and Treasury. The EAC has also in the past recommended increasing involvement from the Treasury and the introduction of a minister for sustainable development. WWF has suggested the creation of a cabinet-level chief secretary for sustainability in the Treasury.⁵⁰ The New Economics Foundation however warns against too much leadership from the Treasury on this issue due to the government's tendency to prioritise economic priorities over social and environmental ones, contrary to the integrated nature needed for sustainable development.⁵¹

Bond also recommends a standalone national sustainable development strategy in response to the new goals, covering the 2030 Agenda, relevant elements of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change agreed in December 2015 saying: "While the UK's sustainable development strategies and indicators have generally taken a broad approach, there is currently no strategy that details the responsibilities of different departments and no reference to international commitments in the current sustainable development indicators."⁵²

It is evident that a mapping and review of existing strategies will be required to identify the most appropriate instruments for national implementation of the SDGs. This would provide a baseline where the UK, its regions and cities are with regard to achieving the goals and targets, identify the national strategies exist that can be updated or streamlined and priority areas on which they should focus. National-

- Colombia's President Santos established the inter-agency commission for the preparation and effective implementation of the post-2015 development agenda and the SDGs in February 2015. This commission decided, through a multi-stakeholder consultation process, to align its national development plan with the SDGs, choosing priority goals and targets. Its 2014–2018 national development plan is now aligned with many goals and targets. It also launched a process for localising the agenda and establishing a national monitoring framework.
- The German Chancellor Angela Merkel signalled her support by making a speech to the German parliament on national implementation of the SDGs in September 2015. Germany decided after a formal process that the German council for sustainable development (RNE) would align the German sustainable development strategy with the SDGs. Primary responsibility for its implementation lies with the Federal Chancellery, supported by the state secretaries' committee for sustainable development, the Sustainable Development Council and the Parliamentary Advisory Council. This is designed to ensure cross-departmental coherence, monitoring and control. All departments are required to identify policy priority areas to be included in and monitored in the national strategy.
- President Obama and former US Ambassador to the UN Samantha Powers both gave high level speeches on the SDGs at the UN and were robust in their assertion that they can be used to tackle domestic issues

affecting the US, particularly on access to justice for minority communities.

- Finland has established an Agenda 2030 coordination hub in the prime minister's office and underwent an extensive process to develop a national action plan by the end of 2016. This process included an external gap-analysis of the country's readiness to implement the 2030 Agenda, a mapping of existing policies, obligations and institutional mechanisms, and an update of their national sustainable development strategy. The prime minister also chairs the national commission on sustainable development. Finland was amongst the first countries to report to the UN HLPF on its progress in July 2016.
- Mexico has a technical committee in the president's office to follow-up and monitor the SDGs.
- Bangladesh has already aligned nine of the 11 goals in its seventh five-year plan (2016–2020) to the SDGs – the remaining two goals are embedded in the SDG targets but have been elevated as priorities based on Bangladesh's national context.
- Belize has merged its growth and poverty reduction strategy with the national sustainable development strategy into one unified and coherent strategy called the growth and sustainable development strategy. The country has also used systems thinking to better understand important policy linkages across immigration, health and environment issues; and created a multi-factor analysis tool to help prioritise actions that have the greatest potential for system-led change.

level, multi-stakeholder dialogues will also be important. Bringing together government ministries, civil society, international agencies, and private sector leaders can catalyse conversations about implementation and get sector leaders to think creatively about implementation.

The UK has some existing strategies with which to work. In addition to the Rio+20 commitment, the 2000 Local Government Act, which requires local authorities to prepare a 'community strategy' outlining how they will promote or improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK, is one such example. It will also be important that a national action plan is developed in line with the government's commitments to the Open Government Partnership, which is inclusive and participatory.

The devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as local authorities, also have a key role to play in driving progress towards the SDGs. Their leadership and strategies can serve to spur action at UK level and feed into the UK national action plan. Thus far the Scottish government has launched the 'fairer Scotland conversation', a national consultation that First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has explicitly linked to the Scottish government's commitment to the SDGs. The Welsh Government has created a national dialogue, the 'Wales We Want', and introduced the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act in 2015, which are both explicitly linked to the SDGs and long-term thinking.

High-level political leadership on this issue is crucial if we are to begin to make progress towards a coherent strategy. Yet this also appears to be one of the biggest challenges facing the domestic implementation of the SDGs in the UK at present.

Multi-stakeholder mapping processes

- Sweden organized a multi-stakeholder conference in January 2016 to mark the starting point of implementing the 2030 Agenda. The government solicited input from wide range of stakeholders on how Sweden relates to the goals and conditions for implementation. Sweden also appointed a commission to facilitate the integration of the SDGs into a comprehensive national action plan and promote the exchange of information and knowledge between stakeholders. The commission will consult with 30–40 government agencies on how the SDGs fit into their respective fields.
- Slovenia is developing a national vision 2050 and strategy which will support the implementation of Agenda 2030 – led by the minister for development and cohesion on behalf of the prime minister – guided by a ‘horizontal group’ (representatives of key ministries and centre of government) and a ‘futures group’ (offers independent perspectives of wider stakeholders in academia, business and civil society.) A national strategy and implementation plan were expected in December 2016.

Cross-governmental mechanisms

The transformative ambition of the 2030 Agenda requires an approach across the whole of government and an implementation strategy which coordinates domestic and foreign policies. This requires fundamentally different way of working. However, in addition to having a patchy track record on successful cross-departmental working, the govern-

ment departments responsible for negotiating the goals are largely different from the ones responsible for implementing the goals domestically. Buy-in and ownership of the SDGs and 2030 Agenda amongst domestic departments is extremely low.

There is a strong role for DFID in raising awareness of the goals, helping to integrate them into government department priorities and updating legislation. But it is crucial the UK's contribution should not be confined to one single department. The number of government departments that will be involved in delivering the SDGs is extensive.

Reducing poverty, inequality, health challenges and promoting sustainable consumption and production are complicated and multi-faceted. No department should operate in isolation. Now that an increasing number of government departments are sharing responsibility for the UK's official development assistance, there is potential for awareness of the SDGs to grow across government. This assumes that ministers and civil servants in other departments administering the SDGs are made aware of the universality principle.

It is clear that the UK needs a cross-departmental body to implement the SDGs, monitor progress and promote accountability. Bond has recommended the creation of an implementation task force on the SDGs to drive forward cross-departmental delivery with leads for each goal. They also recommend consideration in the comprehensive spending review of what it would take to implement the SDGs. The international development select committee, meanwhile, recommends that some formal mechanism be put in place for relevant secretaries of state and ministers to come together regularly to discuss implementation of the SDGs across government. This would also help improve policy coherence

Developed and developing countries are introducing cross-government bodies to implement and monitor the SDGs domestically:

- Colombia's inter-agency commission is chaired by the national planning department with ministerial support from across the government and other sectors to produce an analysis of existing gaps in SDG implementation.
- Germany has established an inter-ministerial state secretaries' committee for sustainable development chaired by the head of the Federal Chancellery. The committee is in charge of the German national sustainability strategy, the framework for the implementation of the post-2015 agenda in Germany. The state secretaries' committee is composed of all ministries' state secretaries to ensure that sustainable development is the guiding principle within all policy areas of the German government. The implementation of the agenda takes place in a cross-cutting, cross-departmental manner.
- Finland established a sustainable development coordination network of all government ministries which works with the prime minister's Agenda 2030 hub and the national commission on sustainable development.
- The US formed an inter-agency process with agencies and departments that address both international and domestic issues putting in place the necessary policies and actions for SDG implementation. The inter-agency meetings are organized through the White House and engage the National Security Council and Domestic Policy Council.

- Ghana established a high-level inter-ministerial committee on SDG to ensure greater coordination among the state agencies for the intergovernmental negotiations as well as the implementation of the SDGs with sectoral groups working together to build synergies.
- Chad, through its ministry of planning, is considering establishing a coordination body under the auspices of the prime minister's office, with the involvement of different ministries, including the ministry of finance and foreign affairs. The body would consist of technical-level 'focal points' from line agencies (adaptation, trade, etc.), and will work closely with the business sector, civil societies and representatives of relevant UN system country offices. Chad may also appoint 'focal points' in key multilateral/bilateral missions and embassies.

across government. Departments should also be assigned specific responsibilities.

The UK government has a number of formal mechanisms that it might explore to catalyse and monitor the implementation of the SDGs. Cabinet committees and other inter-ministerial groupings as well as joint funds and delivery units have in the past been used to promote joint delivery. David Cameron reinforced the role of cabinet committees and after 2015, introduced around a dozen new implementation task forces to drive forward cross-governmental action on key issues, chairing those on immigration and extremism himself. This approach might still find favour. There is, however, currently no mechanism that cuts across the range of issues covered by the SDGs.

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The government has the potential to introduce a working taskforce that brings together relevant ministerial representatives to oversee the implementation of the SDGs.

Monitoring and accountability

A national strategy needs to be accompanied by a set of monitoring and accountability mechanisms. For the SDGs, these should include mechanisms that monitor progress on a number of levels from local to international. The UK parliament, devolved administrations, local government, civil society and non-governmental bodies will all play an important part in ensuring the goals are achieved.

Parliament, through both its policy-making and scrutiny roles, will be crucial in monitoring progress against the goals domestically. Select committees, particularly the international development, environmental audit and public accounts committee, and the National Audit Office will all need to be involved in the evaluation. But the single departmental focus of select committees is a hindrance to accountability when it comes to the SDGs just as it is with other cross-government issues. Individual select committees have been encouraged to look at the UK implementation of the SDGs within their remit. More should follow the lead of the environmental audit and women and equalities committees in doing so. However Bond has suggested there should be a new overarching select committee for the SDGs which would bring together chairs or representatives of all the key select committees to promote parliamentary scrutiny across departmental boundaries. The international development committee takes a slightly different tack and recommends a role for the liaison committee but fails to make a strong recommendation on a cross-departmental scrutiny body apparatus. The government might also want to consider legislating for

an extra-governmental committee like the committee on climate change or an independent scrutiny body like the Independent Commission on Aid Impact.

Again there are examples abroad we might want to follow. Pakistan's parliamentary MDG task force is changing to take account of the SDGs and plans to strengthen its role and functions for SDG implementation. Germany has formed a parliamentary advisory council on sustainable development to provide parliamentary support and evaluate the sustainability impact of federal government activity.

The government here must also update its legislation to ensure that its policy reflects and is reported against the progress it is making to achieving the SDGs. Currently DFID has a legal requirement to report against the MDGs in its annual report. This should be updated as a matter of urgency to reflect the SDGs – a move which would also help DFID staff develop their programming.

Mapping existing data, and ensuring this is disaggregated, is crucial to understanding how a country is faring against the goals. For example, Denmark examined its capacity to measure progress on the SDGs using existing data and determined that currently approximately one-quarter of the targets could be measured, one-third could be measured with slight adjustments to existing data sets, and one-third would require new measurement systems. Peru is building a system of participatory monitoring to ensure accountability.

This is one area in which the UK is faring fairly well. The ONS is currently working to identify the targets most relevant to the UK and how they align to the government's single departmental plans. It has also undertaken a data-gathering exercise with civil society organisations to understand how the targets align with their priorities. It is the ONS's intention to use unofficial data alongside official data and is considering the development of a kite-mark system

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to ensure the quality of unofficial data for civil society and private sector data sources. The impetus for this work came from UK involvement in the UN Statistical Commission to determine the SDG indicators.

The ONS has recognised that there will be some gaps, particularly in indicators that are measured differently in the UK from the indicators presented in the SDGs. It is launching a consultation in May this year to seek feedback on its approach to measurement and reporting of UK progress against the global indicators.

Civil society should be actively encouraged not only to participate in the development of a sustainable development strategy, but also to undertake shadow reporting of the targets. The government should make sure these processes are inclusive and participatory and that all data is available but also easily digestible for these exercises in line with Open Government Partnership principles.

Beyond the UK, monitoring and accountability arrangements are already in place. In July 2016, UN member states convened at the High-level Political Forum, the first since the goals were agreed. A central part of the event were the 'national voluntary reviews', where governments came forward to present reviews of their early SDG progress. Twenty-two countries volunteered to present their plan last year, and demonstrate what action they are taking to implement the 2030 Agenda at the national level. These were China, Colombia, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Madagascar, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Norway, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Switzerland, Togo, Turkey, Uganda and Venezuela.⁵³ Forty-four are due to report in 2017 and the opportunity to volunteer for 2018 is still available. Countries that reported shared progress on actions they took to support the 2030 Agenda, set baseline data and how they are align-

ing national plans, priorities, policies and programmes to the SDGs. There is a lot the UK can learn from these plans, and many of the steps are outlined above.

Accountability must be an ongoing process and there must be strong incentives for countries to keep coming back to the forum and reporting on their progress. Last year's event showed that it can be a credible, trusted and constructive forum where countries share successes and lessons learned. There is potential for the forum to be a useful mechanism to stimulate national implementation and adjust policies, including driving cross-government discussions between presidents' and prime ministers' offices, ministries and parliaments.

Time for a national action plan

The time is long overdue for the UK to introduce a national action plan for implementing the SDGs. Recent assurances that a plan and processes are in place have been insufficient. There is a lack of political leadership, a lack of clear priorities and a lack of clear mechanisms by which to monitor implementation of the SDGs and its progress.

Publicly developing and adopting a coordinated national action plan should not be viewed as an admission that the UK is performing poorly against the goals and targets. Rather it would signal that we are being realistic about the future and the challenges it brings and taking proactive steps to meet our international obligations. Nearly two years after the SDGs were adopted at the UN General Assembly the UK, which showed so much leadership during the negotiation phase, has a responsibility to act upon its commitments.

4: MAKING THE GOALS RELEVANT: THE ROLE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY, THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND THE OPPOSITION

Since September 2015, the government has demonstrated a lack of strategic focus on the SDGs and a failure to acknowledge the domestic challenges we face in implementing them. In this context, civil society, the private sector and political bodies have a key role in generating the awareness, communicating the relevance of the goals and making them an effective tool for accountability and change. Young people should be key participants in this process.

Making people more aware of the SDGs and making them relevant to domestic campaigning are both important first steps. They should be a priority for advocacy organisations seeking to spur the government into action.

Opportunities for action with the SDGs

Civil society and other organisations looking to raise awareness of the SDGs and harness them as effective campaigning and accountability tools should look to the examples of previous successful campaigns.

Communication and education are important starting points as are, in the spirit of the SDGs, the opportunities that are brought through unusual partnerships. Organisations can also play a crucial role in providing essential shadow

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monitoring to ensure government is held to account on its commitments.

Communication

The UN Secretary General's Special Adviser on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has identified communication of the SDGs as his key focus – even above ensuring countries have national action plans. This clearly shows that the UN believes social accountability will be a key way of fulfilling its sustainable development commitments to the goals – and that starts with communicating the message.

In the UK, research undertaken by Brand Legacy⁵⁴ found that most people they surveyed had not heard of the SDGs. But they recognised goals which had direct relevance to their lives, including those focused around health, energy, and water consumption. This is a promising start around which to package a story and create trigger points to change behaviour. And as the New Economics Foundation and the Office for National Statistics have suggested, awareness-raising activities and communications should be tailored issues that already resonate with the public.

Organisations that want to raise public awareness of the SDGs need to find opportunities to highlight them and their potential to address the challenges people face in their daily lives. This includes reaching out to organisations that already work in those areas, but have not yet necessarily engaged with the SDGs, and greater lesson sharing between domestic and international stakeholders about what works.

Given public scepticism towards international frameworks, the SDGs should be portrayed as an opportunity, rather than an obligation. There are many precedents which show how international frameworks and commitments can

While some have pointed out the shortcomings and failures of the MDGs, tremendous progress was made. The MDGs were used a way of mobilising domestic action around the world, and movements like Make Poverty History grew out of a frustration that not enough was being done globally to address the challenge laid down by the goals. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which reinforces children's rights around the world, including their right to protection against violence, has been a crucial advocacy tool for organisations like UNICEF which uses it in many of its biggest campaigns. The UN's systematic focus on violence against children through its study on violence against children and subsequent world report on violence against children has generated detailed evidence on best practice prevention strategies and serves as a key way of advocating at national level. National action to ban chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) was driven by international protocols aimed at protecting the ozone layer and recent drives to ban HFCs have garnered international support and promise swift national action.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has shifted the way civil society and governments talk about human rights and citizen entitlements. Politicians have agreed a set of common language and approaches contained within the framework.

International conventions have also been successful in spurring local action. Climate change commitments are perhaps the most instructive comparison. International action to address man-made climate change, such as Kyoto or the UNFCCC Paris Agreement shares many of the same complexities as the SDGs. Climate change is a

complex and multi-faceted issue which can be disempowering to public audiences. The impetus for action has come from high-level, elite and expert sources. But solutions require action from all.

be valuable tools for national and local advocacy and can provide a basis for real change.

They provide important entry points, a common language and a common frame of reference. The monitoring mechanisms and reporting processes built into international instruments can also help determine ways to influence policy and practice. Even where there are no mechanisms for enforcing international agreements with governments, linking advocacy campaigns to these agreements can be helpful in raising important issues and creating that crucial social accountability.

The success of climate change campaigners in localising an international message and the sentiment which mobilised the public on tax avoidance are both promising models for the SDGs. Both of these campaigns were able to tap into a moment and link the impacts of global and local decisions – highlighting and finding an expression for a shared sense of injustice.

Continuing to build awareness will be critical to maintaining momentum to deliver. The opportunities are immense. The SDGs are a tool which can be harnessed to bring a global commitment and vision for a better world to a very granular level. We need innovation in the way that the SDGs are communicated and translated into change for communities, companies and individuals. The spread of smart phones and social media – and access to the estimated 2.67 billion social

media users around the world⁵⁵ – offer opportunities that did not exist when the MDGs were agreed.

We must also better use the reach that private sector companies have, many of whom have embraced the SDGs through their supply chains. We should also encourage journalists to focus on the real issues that challenge our politicians. There is a strong opportunity to champion where change is already taking place at national, regional and local level. It will also be particularly important to focus on messages that resonate with young people. This will be an important step in not only addressing the lack of public awareness round the SDGs but also in raising awareness of key solutions.

Education

We need to revolutionise the way education is delivered if we are to achieve the levels of public awareness we need to properly deliver sustainable development. The impact of the SDGs will be felt most sharply by the next generation. We are already seeing signs that the millennial generation have different values from their parents' generation and different approaches to work and life. This can be seen in the overwhelming majority of young people that supported remaining in the EU compared with the proportion of people in older age brackets. Young people have a strong desire to do something meaningful in their work. Surveys undertaken by Represent in 2015 show that young people already overwhelmingly think that issues like climate change and inequality are extremely important.⁵⁶ Young people in Britain face challenges which are very different from those their parents faced – student debt, a radically changed work environment, difficulty entering the housing market, personal financial insecurity, the diffusion of technology. This will only continue to change at pace for children being born now.

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The SDGs are a set of norms and values that young people across national boundaries can and do share. They are common to young people in Nairobi, New Delhi and New York. Young people, who are increasingly connected across national borders, will recognise these values as a common reference point.

In this context then, ensuring that the message about the SDGs reaches young people during their education is important. First, the SDGs need to be integrated into the curriculum in the UK. The World's Largest Lesson⁵⁷ can provide a model for this. But it is not enough to add a lesson about the SDGs into a politics or citizenship course. Empowering young people and students to engage with and act on the global challenges addressed within the SDGs is crucial. There are some interesting examples from the US of how the SDGs are being introduced into schools and being combined with challenge-based learning approaches. Vista High School in San Diego has had students and teachers co-design a curriculum which enables students to learn core content and skills by way of developing and acting on solutions to the SDGs.⁵⁸ This will not only help make achieving the goals more likely, but will also help young people as they prepare to enter the world of work.

Finally, we must not underestimate the capacity children have to teach their parents. This is something that should be harnessed to create awareness and a desire for change across generations.

Unusual partnerships

A core tenet of the SDGs is partnership, not just between countries but also between stakeholders at a national level. And not just between the usual suspects either: unusual partnerships will be key to achieving the SDGs. There are

already positive examples around the globe, and in the UK the establishment of organisations like the UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UKSSD) has been a positive step in encouraging dialogue between public, private and third sector stakeholder groups. More can be done however to encourage a variety of organisations – charities, the private sector, trade unions, academic institutions and others – to work together to redefine their approaches, ensuring sustainable development is integral to their work, and to work with government at all levels.

The private sector will play a vital role in delivering the SDGs. Across the world, organisations like the UN Global Compact, Business Fights Poverty and the Business and Sustainable Development Commission have been working to ensure business has had a stake in the negotiations and implementation. The latter's work is particularly designed to help business leaders align their company's objectives with the social and environmental impact they will have.⁵⁹ The UN's Global Pulse initiative⁶⁰, through which Twitter has partnered with the UN to harness data science and analytics for sustainable development and humanitarian action, is a testament to the potential of innovative partnerships.

In the UK, there is a huge opportunity for companies to change their whole approach. The way they do business, use their supply chains and determine their internal structures can all be brought in line with the values of the SDGs. Businesses can also play an important role in communicating the goals to their employees, customers and suppliers creating shifts in behaviour and mindset. And they can do even more through partnering with other organisations to create social change or gather data, supporting marginalised communities where public expenditure is constrained, and helping government create the right enabling environment for the types of investment that will help achieve the goals in

Successes of climate campaigning

Climate organisations have been effective at translating a large global issue into effective awareness at local level. Through campaigns, awareness raising, mobilisations and advertising they have been able to link global phenomena to the realities of communities living across the UK and the things that they care about most – for example, their local environment or protecting their families and homes from extreme weather. Climate campaigners have employed a number of tactics – policy advocacy, story telling, identifying messages of hope, appealing to emotions and identity rather than solely relying on facts – and have taken advantage of the right moments. Ultimately, they empowered citizens to take action and demand change. For example, the European Commission’s ‘You Control Climate Change’ campaign informed individuals about climate change, initiated dialogues and aimed for small behavioural changes. Specifically it focused on reducing scepticism around individuals ability to effect change.

the UK. Integrating the goals into every aspect of their business will create transformative change.

Unusual partnerships can highlight intersecting interests and make them difficult for governments to ignore. In the context of the general election, increased devolution and Brexit, opportunities to design new policies which tackle aspects of the SDGs are particularly potent.

Shadow monitoring and accountability

Civil society and businesses can also be an important partner for government not only in implementing sustainable development but in monitoring progress. A good example is the German council for sustainable development which brings together various domestic stakeholders to support the goals including leaders from business, trade unions, other non-governmental organisations and academia appointed by the Federal Chancellor (see box, page 38). The council advises the government on sustainable development issues and contributes to improving and implementing the German sustainable development strategy and the SDGs. A similar national level body here should be created to independently review progress against the UK's SDG strategy.

Much like the ONS is exploring the use of unofficial data and consulting with civil society and private sector bodies to address data gaps, and so paint a fuller picture of UK performance against the SDGs, the government should see civil society and other organisations as key partners in activities like shadow reporting, and provide core data in a way which is accessible. The government also should take steps to create a central depository for data relating to the SDGs rather than expecting civil society to do it alone.

Young people, likely to be affected by the goals more than most, should also play a core role in monitoring progress. The government should actively encourage and support their involvement through funded forums. Their insights about the rate of progress and which goals to prioritise will be fundamental to them taking ownership of sustainable development – so shaping a world which works for them in future, rather than the policy-makers of the present.

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Democratising change

At their core the SDGs provide an opportunity to democratise change. Civil society, the private sector and a whole host of other organisations have a powerful role to play in this process thanks to the reach they have – through their employees, clients, customers, students, activists, community members. They can all be agents of change.

Global Citizen and other online platforms have been successful in harnessing people power to enact small changes that feed into a larger movement. These platforms use incentives and a message of opportunity rather than obligation to engage their users. The Australian Global Goals Campaign⁶¹ is another model which could inspire UK civil society. It provides a platform for federal, state and local governments, corporations and private companies, educational institutions, community groups, service groups and charities and religious institutions to promote their work towards the achievement of the SDGs. This campaign encourages people to take small actions, works through academic institutions and consults with different organisations about how to most effectively achieve SDGs.

Despite the challenges, the opportunities to harness the SDGs framework for change, to bring together our domestic and international commitments and to hold government to account are great. The goals provide a framework around which to organise, adapt business strategies, engage with local governments to adapt budgets and to support local communities. Awareness needs to be raised amongst the public and amongst domestic organisations which are the most close to communities which will benefit from the goals.

CONCLUSION: A ROAD MAP TO A BETTER FUTURE

As the UK grapples with Brexit and tries to assert itself as an outward-facing and globally engaged nation, its neglect of the SDGs beyond the confines of the Department for International Development sends the wrong signal to the international community.

As we have seen, there are many areas in which the UK performs poorly against relevant targets. The government has shown little will to address these failings strategically. The UK needs to develop both a national strategy and the infrastructure to deliver, monitor and evaluate its progress. Civil society, private sector and political organisations can provide the impetus for this – by raising awareness, harnessing networks, supporting monitoring processes and empowering communities to take action themselves and to seek action from government.

The SDGs can be an effective catalyst for change in the UK, so long as institutional changes are made to enable them to be met.

The SDGs should be viewed as a whole

There are a number of areas in which the UK has a significant amount of work to do to ensure that we are travelling in the right direction towards achieving the goals. The SDG

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framework is a web of interrelated and interdependent goals which mutually reinforce each other. Targets on poverty, inequality, health, energy, climate change and justice, while all important, can still far too often be viewed in isolation. Only when considered in the round, as part of the sustainable development framework, do we see the scale of government failure to deliver on its international commitments for its citizens. But the goals should not simply be seen as an obligation. They offer a clear vision for the future. They offer an opportunity to develop structures and policies that work together to build a better United Kingdom and enable the establishment of partnerships between actors with intersecting interests.

The government needs to demonstrate political leadership and a plan

As a matter of urgency the government elected in June will need to signal high-level political support for the SDGs agenda. Only this will do justice to the leadership shown during the negotiation phase and enhance the UK's global credibility. The March 2017 approach paper is insufficient. There have been many suggestions for how the UK government might best respond to the framework and many international examples of best practice, but as a minimum the UK should:

- Provide leadership from the prime minister's office and Cabinet Office with support from DFID to ensure that the SDGs gain traction across government.
- Establish a cross-departmental committee or task-force for the SDGs and appoint a focal point in each department to ensure clear lines of responsibility and accountability.

- Establish a national action plan which identifies priority areas for the UK, maps existing policies and frameworks that can be used as a basis for our compliance with the SDGs, sets out a national accountability strategy and puts in place a process for review which includes involvement from civil society, private sector and other organisations.
- Actively encourage the participation of civil society in the formulation of the national action plan and in ongoing monitoring and reporting processes, as in the ONS's indicators work.
- Establish a cross-departmental parliamentary scrutiny mechanism with some weight, or an independent mechanism like the Independent Commission for Aid Impact.
- Update relevant legislation to take into account the SDGs and international obligations, particularly the International Development (Reporting and Transparency) Act 2006.
- Reflect the SDGs explicitly and prominently across the 17 single departmental plans.
- Offer to submit a national voluntary review to the High-level Political Forum in 2018.

Communicating the SDGs is key. They are an important framing tool for campaigns and advocacy

Building and maintaining public awareness is still urgently needed. In the absence of political will to implement and monitor the goals at home, they need to become important to the people who are most affected by the issues they address. A number of lessons can be learned from the way successful campaigns have used international and normative frameworks in the past:

- Capitalise on stories and examples that highlight the links between international and local injustices. International

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tax justice campaigns were bolstered when multinational company tax avoidance was uncovered in the UK. This brought campaigners a shared sense of purpose and highlighted the gulf between the UK's domestic and international commitments.

- Localise the issue. Highlight local impacts and find opportunities to demonstrate the potential of the SDGs to address the challenges people face in their daily lives. Empower people to make change that matches the SDGs goals at local level. Champion examples of where change is already happening in line with the SDGs.
- Frame the goals as an opportunity rather than an obligation. Present them as an opportunity for government to champion a vision of a prosperous and sustainable Britain post-Brexit, an opportunity for civil society to engage with its various stakeholders around a common purpose, and an opportunity for business to revitalise approaches to business and engage and gain new customers.
- Harness the power of social media and digital technology to engage, empower and incentivise activists to create tangible change.
- Find common ground in communicating the benefits of acting on the SDGs which enable the establishment of unusual partnerships between organisations that have intersecting interests.

Continuing to build awareness will be critical to maintaining momentum and pressure to deliver. For civil society and businesses, as with government, the SDGs should be integrated into all communications, plans and strategies. Sustainable development should be core business for all organisations.

Harness the power of young people as agents of change

We need a global movement of young people to mobilise around the SDGs. Young people are our future leaders, consumers and community members. They will be key to delivering the goals. Their buy-in is the most powerful support we can gain. They need to see these goals as relevant to their lives, in line with their values and a way of achieving the type of world they want to see. DFID in particular has a strong focus on youth. It should support young people in the UK to engage with the SDGs in their own communities and empower them to become agents of change. This initial awareness-raising can be done through the educational system, but we can go much further. Government and civil society should actively seek input from young people on the direction in which the country is going in order to meet the SDGs.

The SDGs are about long-term shifts in attitudes and values. The goals themselves, and the values which underpin them, can act as a catalyst to revolutionise the way we think about education and preparing young people for their future. There is an opportunity to create an education system which uses the SDGs for more challenge-based learning, encouraging young people to develop solutions to the challenges the world faces.

Young people should also be encouraged to be actively involved in monitoring progress against the goals. The UK government should support a UK and/or global youth forum to identify priorities for action within the SDGs, how to address these and how to monitor progress.

Empowering communities at its heart

The SDGs offer an opportunity to shift agency from the international level down to the local. They are a force for democ-

ratising the process of change. They can help overcome the pessimism over our ability to create international change and provide a way of tackling otherwise too large and disempowering challenges. Given that they include so many areas that touch our lives, they can both empower fresh change and give support to what we are already doing. To make them a success, we need to bring together communities that have pride in their local area; civil society organisations that support them; businesses that are creating jobs, harnessing new technologies and changing their business models; and politicians who are bold. People power can shift political will. It can change the way our economy works and our democracy functions so that they more adequately balance the social, economic and environmental imperatives and so achieve truly sustainable development.

The SDGs are an ambitious and transformative framework offering a road map for all countries around the world. They provide a strong set of commitments against which to hold the government to account and to empower citizens to act as agents of change. This is an exciting agenda. It was not imposed on us. We were part of the process from the very beginning.

We are at a time of incredible potential. We may not meet of the goals globally by 2030, but the aspiration and direction we have collectively set ourselves are important. The 2030 Agenda is wide-ranging development plan. It creates a compelling call to action for a wide range of stakeholders. The challenge now is to convert that potential into action.

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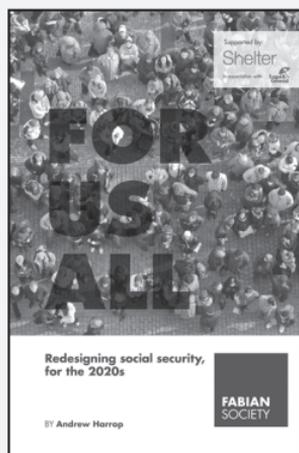
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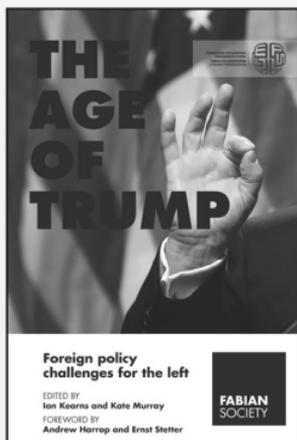
For Us All

Redesigning social security, for the 2020s

Andrew Harrop

For Us All examines the reform of social security for children and working-age adults, in the 2020s. For six years of the Cameron government, 'austerity' dominated all discussion of benefit policies. Now it is time to turn a page and start to consider the long-term future of social security, as part of a strategic agenda for raising British living standards. Social security for pensioners is now on a strong and sustainable footing. But the system for non-pensioners will be worse in 2020 than it was in 2010 – and will carry on getting worse, unless policy changes.

The report examines the reason why current policies are failing and then assesses improvements to means-tested, contributory and universal benefits as well as private support, proposing that the end-point might be a tiered system with elements of them all.



The Age of Trump

Foreign policy
challenges for the left

Edited by Ian Kearns
and Kate Murray

The first months of Donald Trump's presidency have been turbulent ones. We have come to expect the unexpected from the showman in the White House and his team. How should the left respond in these uncertain times? How does a progressive vision for the world fit with the challenges we now face? This collection of essays aims to set out some ways forward.

In it, policy experts in the UK, Europe and the US, outline some of the most pressing issues we face, from climate change to nuclear proliferation and from conflict in the Middle East to international aid. They highlight how the Trump administration might bring its influence to bear in these areas, and how we need to respond.

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Delivering on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in the UK

Every country in the world has signed up to the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, an ambitious package designed to tackle poverty, protect the planet and improve lives. The UK was one of the driving forces in ensuring the programme was adopted. But more recently, progress here has been slow. Too few people know what the goals mean for their lives – and too many targets are being missed.

This pamphlet is focused on what the UK is doing domestically and what more the government, the private sector, campaigners and others need to do to make progress. It sets out a series of recommendations to help make the goals the foundation for a better future here in the UK as well as across the globe.

Jessica Toale is an international development and foreign affairs specialist and has advised governments and international networks on the implementation of the SDGs.

With a foreword by Lord McConnell, co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development.

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£9.95