

## **FRANCE**

### **Implementing the 2030 Agenda at Home and Abroad Presents New Challenges to France**

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*Abstract:*

*The fact that France has volunteered for National Reviews at the High Level Political Forum in July 2016 initiates the long road that will lead to the implementation of Agenda France 2030, both domestically and internationally. France must now get involved in implementing a just transition from an unsustainable economy to genuinely sustainable development that leaves no one behind. This involves shifts in investments, creating decent jobs, establishing social dialogue and maintaining social protection. A country should be considered as having achieved a just transition only if poverty is eradicated and sustainability achieved.*

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We welcome the fact that France has volunteered for National Reviews at the 2016 session of the High Level Political Forum one year after the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been adopted. This initiates the long road that will take France to the implementation of Agenda France 2030 in all its public policies, both domestically and internationally. Agenda France 2030 also states that work is underway to develop indicators to monitor the implementation of the SDGs in France.

We also welcome the leadership shown by France for the COP21 which led to the Paris Agreement, enabling the international community to make concrete commitments concerning global climate change.

In order to respect its commitments France must now get involved in implementing a just transition from an unsustainable economy to genuinely sustainable development that leaves no one behind. The concept of a just transition, adopted by the ILO in 2013, involves shifts in investments, creating decent jobs, establishing social dialogue and maintaining social protection. A country should be considered as having achieved a just transition only if poverty is eradicated and sustainability achieved.

France, as a rich and strong country, has targets for domestic sustainability as well as international responsibilities. Common but differentiated responsibilities are fully applicable. The importance of not harming people in the process must also not be overlooked. Environmental sustainability, social inclusion and economic development have to be integrated in the French agenda. The various policies which are envisioned risk lacking coherence and could fall short of maximum impact.

Agenda 2030 seeks to realize human rights for all. We cannot label a country as “developed” when 8 percent of the population lives in poverty<sup>1</sup> and its mode of consumption and production are depleting the resources of the planet. Countries should not be rated only by GDP but also by their environmental sustainability and access to human rights for all of their citizens. Even though France is the world’s sixth largest economy,<sup>2</sup> poverty is widespread in the country and extreme poverty is persistent.<sup>3</sup> Many people have to endure the violence of poverty and inequalities weaken social cohesion and democracy.

Regarding international responsibility, France’s contribution to Official Development Assistance (ODA) is actually far from the 0.7% of the GNP which was pledged decades ago. In 2010 ODA was only 0.50 percent and dropped to 0.37 percent<sup>4</sup> in 2015. Financial support from the richest countries to the poorest is indispensable to the achievement of SDGs. There is a gap between words and acts.

## **Challenges to implementing the SDGs in France**

**The need to integrate poverty eradication with tackling climate change.** Agenda France 2030 needs to address sustainability and the causes of poverty and inequality. All domestic policies should be coherent and designed to achieve the SDGs. Stronger coherence between domestic and international policies is needed. Effective governance will also be necessary to implement a comprehensive agenda. The office of the prime minister could be in charge of implementing Agenda France 2030, since it involves many bodies of the Government that must work in synergy. Intermediate bodies and civil society need to be part of this effort and should be encouraged to become involved.

**The need to adopt a human rights approach to sustainable development.** The measures and policies listed in Agenda France 2030 lack a human rights approach. Each of the SDGs should be linked to international resolutions promoting human rights. Research done by the French Human Rights Consultative Commission (CNCDH)<sup>5</sup> has shown that all of the SDGs are supported by various conventions and resolutions.

Agenda France 2030 mentions access to basic rights like commodities, water and food, but lacks a full approach in terms of human rights. The UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights<sup>6</sup> adopted on 27 September 2012, by the UN General Assembly at the 21<sup>st</sup> session of the

Human Rights Council could be used to design a comprehensive plan to bring in the very poor.

**The need for a better understanding of poverty.** Poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, and should be viewed, researched and addressed as such.<sup>7</sup> The inadequacy of existing systems for conceptualizing and measuring poverty is a considerable obstacle to ending it. Far too often poverty is envisioned only in its economic dimension. Income is not the only criteria to be considered. Social exclusion, stigmatization, lack of access to basic rights, lack of participation and so on are criteria which have to be considered. In-depth understanding of poverty would lead toward new criteria for measuring poverty, greater transparency in terms of policies to address it, and more accountability.

In France, today, eradication of poverty has still to be met. Over three million children live below the poverty threshold.<sup>8</sup> More than 10 percent of the population relies on social benefits to survive.<sup>9</sup> Visible and invisible poverty must be taken into account. Inequalities between regions, between city centres and deprived suburbs should be addressed. The latter are often underequipped and have insufficient means.

In addition, France lacks a genuine programme for enabling people in deep poverty to escape it. Decently paid jobs, quality education for all, housing accessible to people on low incomes, access to health care for all and citizen participation should be the steps toward true economic and social inclusion.

**The need to consider people living in poverty as true actors of change.** People living in poverty are too often considered as people lacking means, power and the will to escape their condition. They are considered a burden. Their lack of political voice and social capital is the reason why they are often overlooked by service providers and policy-makers. This oversight leads to policies and measures which will frequently fail to reach their goal. Social policies should be designed in cooperation with people living in poverty. Drawing on their resistance to poverty is very fruitful. Prioritizing the views of the people with direct experience of material and social deprivation should be a guideline.

**The need to be ambitious in order to leave no one behind in development.** Agenda 2030 is a major initiative and a fresh undertaking to achieve a global transformation. It has created hope that people living in poverty will be at the heart of the efforts to implement the SDGs. There is a need to rethink all the knowledge, programmes and commitments to make it possible. This is a major endeavor. Agenda France 2030 does not seem to have reached the point of the Copernican revolution which is what is needed.

The poorest people, the poorest countries should be the benchmark for each and every SDG. Any goals and targets should be considered to be

achieved only if the bottom quintile is reached. Strong financial commitment, both at national and international level is missing. The French Law on the Orientation and Programming of Development and International Solidarity (LOPDSI) adopted in July 2014<sup>10</sup> recommends the UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights. It favours participation of vulnerable groups in designing, implementing and assessing development projects. This law should be fully implemented.

Domestically, France has a series of laws designed to ensure economic and social rights,<sup>11</sup> as well as a number of social benefits (unemployment benefit, retirement pension, active solidarity income etc.) that provide a good safety net. These laws are the basis of social cohesion, and were developed with the support of civil society and NGOs. However they must be continually monitored to make sure they are fully implemented. The stigmatization attached to receiving these benefits prevents potential beneficiaries applying. As many as 50 percent of people eligible for RSA (active solidarity income) do not file applications.<sup>12</sup> Better information, simplification of the procedures, respect of private life should improve access to social benefits greatly.

Discrimination against the poor is one of the reasons why laws are not fully implemented and miss their goal. We have witnessed far too often discrimination on the ground of social precariousness. For example, people living in neighbourhoods known as being poor are more often denied employment; beneficiaries of CMU (universal health coverage) are more often denied health care; people living on benefits are often denied access to subsidized housing, and so on. Vulnerable people are stigmatized instead of prioritized for protection from poverty. Discrimination on the grounds of poverty hinders access to rights.

This phenomenon has been highlighted and blind testing has shown that the poor suffer discrimination.<sup>13</sup> In June 2016, the French Parliament passed a law acknowledging the 21st criterion of discrimination on the ground of precariousness. This is a powerful tool to raise awareness and fight discrimination. There should be a shift in public opinion and in public discourse which still too often stigmatize the poor.

**The need to extend the right to education to all.** In spite of free and mandatory education, the French school system fails to reduce social inequalities.<sup>14</sup> One out of five students leaves school without a diploma or professional certificate. Competitive and selective education hinders achievement. The Economic and Social Council showed that cooperative teaching methods, strengthening links between school and parents, implementing analysis of practice and making possible the sharing of good practices are means of improving greatly the performances of all students. Lifelong learning in France is under-used and could improve access to employment.

**The need to protect the right to housing.** There are 900 000 people in France living without their own accommodation and 3.8 million living in

poor housing conditions.<sup>15</sup> Subsidized housing is lacking and is not even affordable for the poorest or for the working poor. Homeless people are suffering many other denials of rights. The DALO law<sup>16</sup> (enforceable right to housing) institutionalizes priorities among people applying for subsidized housing. However one third of people who are recognized as needing housing in emergency do not obtain it.

**The need to protect the right to decent work.** The unemployment rate in France has risen to 10.2 percent in 2016 and 700,000 people have been unemployed for over three years. Large-scale unemployment leads to widespread impoverishment. Youth unemployment is especially harmful.

Government policies should develop businesses that support job creation, and promote those which prove to be socially and environmentally responsible, thereby promoting an economic model that replaces the goal of growth with that of prosperity and is compatible with sustainability. This economic model is being tested in France through the project *Zero long term work-seeker zones*.<sup>17</sup> In several regions of France long-term unemployment is being suppressed using unemployment allowances to create jobs.

**The need to support climate mitigation and adaptation in France** as well as in less affluent countries. People living in Europe are not seen as suffering from climate change. However the poorest of them will endure increasing hardship. Respiratory diseases and peaks of fatalities during heat waves are likely to affect the weakest, including the homeless. Those living in run-down and poorly insulated housing will be condemned to use more energy at greater cost. Poor neighbourhoods often lack public transport which hinders energy conservation.

The recent energy law (energy transition for green growth)<sup>18</sup> is meant to provide new ways to advance sustainability. Energy vouchers<sup>19</sup> have been created to lessen the burden of energy costs which will inevitably increase. This measure needs to be reinforced. The potentially negative impact on the poor of transition to a green economy should be avoided.

Energy conservation is still a major challenge for the long term. Achieving the European Union targets of 32 percent renewable energy by 2030 and 55 percent by 2050<sup>20</sup> requires no longer subsidizing fossil fuel production, phasing out nuclear power and preventing energy waste. Adaptation and mitigation strategies should be based on human rights.

## **Conclusion: Overarching principles**

Reaching first those who are the furthest behind, and measuring success only when all segments of society have benefited from progress is a prerequisite to the realization of sustainable development. People living in poverty should be partners in development, their experience and knowledge should be fully recognized. The national and international communities both need to recognize that people living in poverty have

valuable knowledge that can contribute to the construction of policy and development programmes.

The design and implementation of any measures and policies affecting the poor should be done with their involvement. Scarcity of resources needs to be addressed. Tax and monetary policies could be pursued as well as promoting a financial system that incentivizes a reallocation of a small percentage of savings to global needs.

The political will to implement the necessary reforms and equally, preferential treatment for the most vulnerable people and the least developed countries is needed. For this we will need a radical shift in our thinking and practices. Institutions that allow for inclusive and participatory decision-making, monitoring and accountability will be crucial.

The challenge is not only about achieving the SDGs, it is also - and equally importantly- about walking the path together and learning in the process how to think, plan and act, with those who have been traditionally excluded. Over time these actions will work toward reducing inequalities, strengthening democracy and building peace.

## **Notes**

- 1 Observatoire des inégalités; <http://www.inegalites.fr/spip.php?article270>  
INSEE Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques
- 2 IMF <http://donnees.banquemondiale.org/region/WLD>
- 3 Observatoire national de la lutte contre la pauvreté. Rapport 2016;  
[http://www.onpes.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Rapport\\_ONPES\\_2016\\_bd-2.pdf](http://www.onpes.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Rapport_ONPES_2016_bd-2.pdf)
- 4 International Forum of National NGO Platforms IFP  
C-Sud <http://ifp-fip.org/en/francais-solidarite-internationale-la-france-se-desengage-fortement/>  
*C-Sud Lancement de l'Agenda France 2030 Remarques critiques et propositions alternatives sur le document de travail français en vue du HLPF*
- 5 Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme (CNCDH), Objectifs de Développement Durables et les Droits de l'Homme. Forthcoming 2016
- 6 A/HRC/RES/26/3  
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session26/Pages/ResDecStat.aspx>  
[http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/OHCHR\\_ExtremePovertyandHumanRights\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/OHCHR_ExtremePovertyandHumanRights_EN.pdf)
- 7 *Dimensions of poverty and how to measure them*, pilot research project, Oxford University, ATD Fourth World, 2016.
- 8 [http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2015/06/09/droits-de-l-enfant-les-echecs-de-la-france\\_4649967\\_3224.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2015/06/09/droits-de-l-enfant-les-echecs-de-la-france_4649967_3224.html)
- 9 Agenda France 2030.
- 10 Loi d'orientation et de programmation relative à la politique de développement et de solidarité internationale 4 juillet 2016 <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000029210384&categorieLien=id>
- 11 For example, La loi d'orientation contre la grande pauvreté et la précarité économique et sociale, CMU, loi sur le Droit Au Logement Opposable, la loi d'orientation et programmation pour la refondation de l'école de la République.
- 12 Agenda France 2030.
- 13 *On n'est pas traité comme tout le monde Discrimination et pauvreté, analyses, testings et recommandations*, ATD Quart Monde, IRFRH et ISM Corum, 2013  
[https://www.atd-quartmonde.fr/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/DiscriminationPauvrete\\_LivreBlanc.pdf](https://www.atd-quartmonde.fr/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/DiscriminationPauvrete_LivreBlanc.pdf)
- 14 CESE [Une école de la réussite pour tous | Travaux Publiés | Travaux du CESE](http://www.lecese.fr/travaux-publies/une-cole-de-la-r-ussite-pour-tous)  
[www.lecese.fr/travaux-publies/une-cole-de-la-r-ussite-pour-tous](http://www.lecese.fr/travaux-publies/une-cole-de-la-r-ussite-pour-tous) (reussitedetous.lecese.fr)
- 15 *La mise en œuvre du Droit au logement opposable* Ministère du logement, Fondation Abbé Pierre, CNLE, INSEE. Bilan du DALO 2012-2014, N°10.
- 16 DALO Droit Au Logement Opposable La loi n° 2007-290 du 5 mars 2007  
<http://www.logement.gouv.fr/le-droit-au-logement-opposable-dalo>
- 17 <https://www.atd-quartmonde.fr/mot-cle/territoires-zero-chomeur-de-longue-duree/>
- 18 <http://www.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/-France-launches-its-energy-LOI-n-2015-992-du-17-août-2015-relative-à-la-transition-énergétique-pour-la-croissance-verte>  
<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichLoiPubliee.do?idDocument=JORFDOLE000029310724&type=general&legislature=14>
- 19 Chèques énergie
- 20 Access to European Union Law;  
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0885>