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Roadmap for the implementation of the SDGs in France: progress report

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In May 2018, a steering committee launched the creation of a roadmap for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in France. A second meeting of this committee took place on 11 January 2019. The first draft of this roadmap—envisioned as a joint agenda for inclusiveness and the ecological transition—was presented by the French Secretaries of State, Brune Poirson (Ecological and Inclusive transition) and Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne (Europe and Foreign Affairs). This 140-page document is the result of a multi-stakeholder consultation and represents an opportunity to consider which proposals should be retained as well as to pinpoint various areas of improvement. What are the key points ensuing from this progress report? What are the next steps from this process?

A multi-stakeholder process high in ambition

The first phase of work on the roadmap, which took place between June and December 2018, involved the mobilization of a wide range of actors from companies, associations and academia—which were then divided into different working groups (26 in all)¹.

The chapter presenting the vision for the roadmap clearly and explicitly outlines the SDGs as a tool for transformation and a social project. Consequently, the expectations from civil society are high.

The echoes between the 2030 Agenda—with its ambition to reconcile inclusiveness and the ecological transition—and the current situation in France was noted during this meeting by Brune Poirson, who saw within the SDGs many answers to the crisis of meaning currently enveloping the nation. The minister in fact made the connection with the French National Debate² in which she invited the stakeholders present to participate as well; the general commissioner for sustainable development Laurence Monnoyer-Smith further suggested that the results of this national debate could be taken into consideration for drafting the roadmap. The minister Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne also recognized the transformative potential of the SDGs and spoke about wanting to make the link with the SDGs and the French presidency of the G7 this year³ (which is incidentally focused on fighting inequality) as well as with the draft law on international cooperation and development. Insufficient translation into action or reassessment of existing practices

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The ministries also contributed to this first draft of the roadmap. While these contributions are rich in content, the approach lacks a strategic analysis involving a reassessment of current practices and the changes needed to meet the challenges of the SDGs and their cross-cutting nature. In fact, large portions of the roadmap simply reaffirm existing plans and measures (and this is true of even those parts not drafted by the ministries). For instance, the chapters on SDG1 (poverty eradication) and SDG10 (reduced inequality) primarily restate France's recently-adopted poverty plan. It goes without saying that an SDG roadmap could go much further.

On the one hand, [an analysis of the 29 targets of the 2030 Agenda](#) carried out by IDDRI shows that this agenda requires far-reaching changes and that France runs the risk of failing to achieve three-quarters of them by 2030, based on past trends.

On the other hand, as an NGO pointed out during the meeting, an SDG roadmap could develop measures that aim for both the zero carbon and zero poverty targets at once. For the moment, the contributions of the different ministries, each of which is responsible for one or several of the 17 SDGs, still represent compartmentalised approaches even as the very rationale of the 2030 Agenda is based on overcoming silos. In this respect, the existing draft of the roadmap does not succeed in translating the cross-cutting nature of the 2030 Agenda or its call for alignment between policies.

Avenues for concrete measures going forward

The chapter on the cross-cutting implementation levers for the SDGs develops some avenues for concrete applications of the SDGs in the French context. These raised interest among a considerable number of actors and IDDRI contributed to their analysis. The chapter proposes, for instance, that the 2030 Agenda be integrated into the drafting of legislation by improving the quality of impact assessments. This would entail assessing the impact of all

future laws using the indicators of the 'Sas-Act' (new wealth indicators)⁴ or a selection of SDG indicators. An example of this could be considering the impact of all policies on the poorest 20% of the population as was suggested by the NGO ATD Quart Monde during the meeting. An annual Parliamentary evaluation session focused around the SDGs and Sas-Act indicators is also proposed in the document; this one-day session could take into account an independent assessment by civil society and enlist the media in order to fuel public debate regarding France's progress towards a sustainable future by 2030.

The working group also drew up several measures aimed at improving the clarity of the national budget vis-à-vis its contribution towards sustainable development: creating a data dashboard allowing citizens to follow the implications of the budget, for instance, or enabling the Court of Auditors to assess the progress on SDGs.

Since all these proposals were put forward by a multi-stakeholder group, their relevance and potential procedures for implementation must now be evaluated at a more political level.

What are the next steps from this process?

Apart from political validation for a few of the proposed measures, several questions remain to be addressed. In particular, how can one facilitate their transition into action? And how to overcome silos? A possible way forward is to reorganise the working groups by mobilising actors around 2 or 4 concrete themes or agendas instead. The working group "Vision" has identified 6: reducing inequality, improving health and education, climate change, eradicating poverty and gender equality. These analyses could aim at developing specific targets and generating commitments from various actors, ministries included. Another approach could be to reorganise working groups around some promising action areas such as budget clarity, impact assessment reforms, certain tangible action-levers intended to encourage new economic models, as put forth in the chapter on SDG12 (such as ensuring widespread take-up of sustainable procurement practices), or the development of participatory research projects for SDGs (mentioned by both the "Research" and "Association" working groups). These action areas do not cover all fields but could constitute the axes for the transition into action and transformation. Other potential areas can be identified, with a key aspect of the next phase of the drafting of the roadmap involving reflection on ensuring its operationalisation. In the end, the central question emerging from this first phase is the policy implementation of this roadmap. The ministers' speeches spoke of the current social situation in France as a moment of truth for the 2030 Agenda: a test of its added value as a tool for mediation between social, economic and environmental goals. Will all the actors concerned grasp its true importance?

¹ IDDRI participated in the capacity of an independent think tank by co-chairing and facilitating meetings for the working group on levers for implementation and follow-up.

² <https://granddebat.fr/>

³ <https://www.elysee.fr/g7>

⁴ <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000030478182&categorieLien=id>