

# **SDGs are for everyone, and everyone needs to be involved.**

By Paul Hoffman SC - 21 January 2018

**In January 2018 the Kwale County Government in Kenya hosted a conference at which economic development was discussed by panelists drawn from all over the world. The Swiss ambassador opened the conference which drew Dr Julius Muia, the director general steering Kenya Vision 2030, as keynote speaker.**

Unpacking the deliberations at the conference in a manner that makes sense to the common woman or man is no easy task.

In 2015 the United Nations adopted the sustainable development goals or SDGs as they are known as the blueprint for giving the nations of the earth the type of future that people everywhere want for their children. The Kenya Vision 2030 policy largely overlaps with the aims of the SDGs and was developed before their international adoption.

## **What then do ordinary people want?**

Distilling the 17 SDGs into an answer to this important question can be done in five concepts: peace, progress and prosperity for people and planet. It is a given that in the absence of peace that is secure, progress that is sustainable and prosperity that is shared there will be insufficient happy people on a stressed planet to claim success for the SDGs. Indeed, all of the SDGs relate in some way to that elusive "better life for all" that constitutions and politicians so frequently promise and so seldom deliver all around our planet, threatened as it is by climate change, scarcity of water in currently populated areas and movement of refugees from areas of war and stress to areas that are currently peaceful, prosperous and well resourced.

If prosperity is not shared, peace becomes elusive as the "haves" and the "have nots" clash over resources, territory and the means to create wealth.

In this process progress is not as rapid and as sustainable as envisaged by those who developed the SDGs. The target date 2030 becomes 2063 and the whole project deteriorates into wishful thinking, pipe dreams and myth rather than developing into 17 implemented goals.

## **How then are the good things that the SDGs aim for to be delivered?**

Everyone is responsible for rolling out the SDGs: not just governments, public servants and international agencies; everyone needs to embrace the vision and ask the question: "How can I help?" This is a matter of public education at all levels and of the generation of the political will at grass roots level without which the SDGs will be stillborn. The media, the education systems and the faith based organizations are all important actors in getting the grass roots support without which success will elude those who work to achieve implementation in good time.

## **Why then have the SDGs found so little traction in the public imagination?**

Apart from the obvious consequences of not making the SDGs widely known, there is a mistrust of politicians and officials that is both endemic and well earned. While too many enter politics and the public administration not to serve their fellow citizens but instead to enrich themselves and their cronies, trust in the system will not reach the required threshold that secures the buy in of the population that is the intended beneficiary of the SDGs.

The cure to the "mistrust malady" is the creation of strong institutions (ironically one of the key SDGs) that are capable of rooting out corruption in high places, both public and private, and thereby restoring credibility to the institutions through which implementation of the SDGs can be achieved so that secure peace, sustainable progress and shared prosperity are reality around the planet.

**Corruption cannot be allowed to continue to bedevil the implementation of the SDGs.**

Anti-corruption machinery of state that is effectively able to prevent, combat, investigate and prosecute the corrupt must be put in place in all countries that are serious about the implementation of the SDGs.

Specialized and well-trained corruption busters who enjoy security of tenure of office are vital to the success of the war on corruption. Properly resourced and independent institutions are what is needed. If structural and operational independence, free of executive influence and interference, are the essential features of the corruption busting machinery of state, then success in rebuilding public trust is possible. An atmosphere in which cooperation on the implementation of the SDGs will be nurtured and the better life for all will become a reality as the various SDGs are rolled out. Priority should be given to SDG 16: it envisages the creation of strong institutions to replace weak, greedy and corrupt individuals and structures.

Its realization is a difficult but necessary precursor to the success of the SDGs and to a better life for all.

**How can you help?**

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