

Labour National Policy Forum consultation: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

Submission on behalf of the following members of the Progressive Development Forum: Health Poverty Action; Global Justice Now; ASLEF; Tipping Point North South; Western Sahara Campaign UK.

How can Labour help build a movement for sustainable development and the achievement of the SDGs?

Labour needs to create a new vision which articulates that the many – whether in the UK or across the world – have been failed by the current economic order. It needs to set out a vision that builds solidarity across borders for action to tackle the root causes of poverty and inequality that affect us all. This will include focusing on the redistribution of wealth – again, nationally and globally - as a legitimate and just means to eradicate poverty, drawing connections to issues such as tax avoidance and harmful trade practices that put corporate profits first. Particular focus should be put on the UK's role in facilitating these injustices, such as London's status as the world's major financial centre, at the heart of unjust debt and lending practises, tax avoidance and evasion and the hiding of wealth obtained by corruption.

This means abandoning the language of aid and charity, and replacing it with the language of social justice, human rights, and solidarity. Labour needs to prioritise promoting public understanding of the root causes of poverty and inequality, both in the UK, and globally. Labour's recent publication 'A World For the Many', is a very welcome step in this direction.

Labour should work with a broad spectrum of social movements, trade unions; progressive NGOs; progressive political parties, academic institutions, diaspora organisations and liberation movements in the UK and internationally, who share its vision of a world for the many. It should work closely with its activists, and with organisations such as Momentum; and ensure that its policy is informed through consultation exercises and focus groups to embed internationalism throughout all levels of the Party. This includes grassroots education here in the UK to build a permanent mobilisation for Labour's approach.

In which SDG goals is the UK best placed to lead the way?

The SDG framework aims to provide an integrated, inter-dependent agenda for addressing global poverty and inequality, and addressing the environmental threats to the planet. We would not advocate prioritising one of the goals over others. That said, Goal 10 on reducing inequality could be said to underpin the SDG framework – Labour's commitment to incorporate this goal within the objectives of DfID is therefore very welcome.

The existing language of Goal 10 is inadequate. Target 10.1, states "by 2030 progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40% of the population at a rate higher than the national average." There are two problems here: First, the language allows for inequality to grow until 2029 before we must gradually begin to reduce it. Second, even if the growth rate of incomes in the bottom 40% are higher than the national average, inequality – in absolute terms – may still be growing. The language of Goal 10 needs to be strengthened to require a reduction of *absolute* inequality to a certain level by 2030. Again, Labour's commitment to encourage countries to sign up to more ambitious targets than those set in SDG 10, with the goal of halving their existing Palma Ratio by 2030 and achieving a Palma Ratio of 1 by 2040, is welcome in this context.

Goal 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth, is also highly problematic. While the goal makes reference to 'sustainable' economic growth, the articulation of the goal, and the associated targets, perpetuate the assumption that ever-increasing levels of extraction, production, and consumption is the path to addressing poverty and inequality. This assumption is flawed on two counts. First, there is no automatic correlation between growth and poverty reduction; it depends on how the yields of growth are distributed. In order to work, any growth must have a radical pro-poor bias. Second, *aggregate global* growth is not compatible with our planet's ecology, given that we are already overshooting planetary boundaries. While some growth may be necessary in poor nations, rich nations need to adopt post-growth policies. One first step would be to move away from the pursuit of GDP in favour of better measures, like the Genuine Progress Indicator, which account for the social and ecological externalities of growth.

A Labour government should lobby for either the removal of Goal 8 or for new language that specifies growth for whom.

How can the SDG goals galvanise action at home, in schools, in communities, and in workplaces across the UK?

Given their universal nature and global recognition, the SDGs can provide a platform on which to build narrative and action to address the root causes of poverty and inequality.

Better global learning – including education about colonialism, structural adjustment and the causes of poverty - could and should be incorporated at multiple points in the curriculum. This should form part of a broader 'decolonising' of the curriculum to better reflect our place in the world and further people's understanding of poverty. Labour should set up a taskforce sitting between DfID and the Department for Education to develop and implement this approach, in conjunction with activists working on these issues.

A narrative that moves away from charity towards justice represents a clear break from tired development tropes. Labour should establish an International Communications Advisory Group, made up of experts in values and frames (to include the Public Interest Research Centre) who should commission focus groups, discussions with PLPs, Labour Party and Momentum activists, to develop and test the most effective messaging for a new internationalism and ensure it is embedded throughout the party.

How can Labour monitor progress on the SDGs and ensure governments, including the UK, deliver on them?

Labour should develop indicators to measure progress that are fit for purpose. Often indicators are lacking in terms of their detailed definition and their level of disaggregation. For example, the World Health Organisation indicator 'health service access' is defined as 'percentage of population living within 5km of a health facility'. This does not tell us how many of the people living within 5km of the health service are able to access it, ignoring barriers that may be financial, legal or cultural. Any set of health service indicators should measure availability and quality of health services, in conjunction with barriers to accessing them, and health outcomes.

Indicators need to be appropriately disaggregated, so that they measure progress in relation to all of the categories identified in SDG commitments including ethnicity and migratory status– not just age, gender, geography and disability, as is the case in DFID's current approach, and in the approach of many other countries and institutions. Again using health as an example, the available data on indigenous women's maternal health show that they have significantly worse access to services, and

health outcomes, than the general population. For example, San women in Namibia are ten times more likely to give birth without skilled attendance than the general population. Action is therefore necessary to address the cultural barriers to accessing health services that are experienced by indigenous women. However, existing data on such barriers is very sparse, not least because the main international surveys generally do not disaggregate data on the basis of ethnicity.

Goal 1 promises to eradicate poverty by 2030. But the poverty line for this goal is set very low, at only \$1.25 per day. Scholars agree that this line is too low for meaningful human subsistence, and its use suggests that poverty has been decreasing when in reality only minimal gains have been achieved. A fairer and more accurate line would be \$5 per day, which is the minimum necessary for basic nutrition, life expectancy, and reduced infant mortality. The Labour paper 'A World for the Many' uses the \$5/day line, and a Labour government should lobby for this more accurate line to be adopted by other governments and international institutions to monitor progress against the SDGs.

How can Labour best make the argument for international development? What specific pledges should Labour commit to achieving for the world's poorest?

The argument for international development must be premised on an understanding of the causes of poverty and inequality, and the creation of solidarity against the capture of wealth by elites and big business.

In the last 30 years, the notion of international development has been corrupted. Separated from the context of the causes of poverty, it has become intertwined with notions of aid and charity. This has created dubious power dynamics – suggesting that international development is about the charity of UK taxpayers. As demonstrated by the declining support for aid, in times of austerity, this approach has pitted people against each other, and eroded solidarity.

The alternative is a more accurate vision which acknowledges that many of the causes of poverty that affect people in the UK – austerity, privatisation, corporate tax dodging - are the same that affect people in all parts of the world, and sets out a clear vision to address them for the benefit of the many everywhere.

'Reclaiming Internationalism' (<https://www.healthpovertyaction.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Reclaiming-internationalism-WEB-1017.pdf>), a paper published by members of Progressive Development Forum, proposes ten priorities for Labour's approach, focusing on ending the root causes of global poverty and inequality.

What would a world for the many, not the few, look like in 2030, and how could Labour's international development policy commit to achieving it?

A world for the many, not the few, is one in which people everywhere enjoy access to quality healthcare, education and other public services, and have their rights- including the rights to food, water and sanitation- met. It is a world in which people in the global South have control of their own economies, their own societies and their own lives. It is a world with much greater levels of equity, both within and between countries.

This will be achieved by challenging unjust financial and economic rules and the rejection of neoliberal models of political, economic and social policy. A number of countries – South Korea, Ecuador, the Nordic countries, for example - have already shown how this approach can work to address poverty and inequality.

A world for the many requires shifting power away from big business and unaccountable institutions and back towards people and communities. It requires any institution claiming to fight poverty and inequality to be accountable to those whose lives they claim to change.

In a world fit for the many, not the few, poverty would be understood not just as a lack of resources, but also a lack of power.

To achieve this, Labour's international development policy must be driven by the need to address the structural causes of global poverty and inequality. This must include overlooked issues such as the so called war on drugs, which despite its role as a key driver of poverty and inequality is often ignored by development actors.

How can Labour spend the aid budget in the most effective way to help achieve the SDGs?

The spending of the aid budget must be consistent with a progressive Labour approach to addressing global poverty and inequality. This means that it should be conceived as one form of wealth redistribution to people who have been most impoverished by the economic system, and renamed to reflect this – options include redistribution, solidarity fund, compensation, or reparations. This approach also requires that Labour reviews the support that the UK gives to neoliberal institutions.

Developing the public sector should be at the heart of aid spending (including providing expertise from, for example, the NHS). The UK should stop exporting failed parts of our public services, such as public private partnerships, and focus instead on helping countries achieve the best aspects of our public services – universal provision free at the point of use. Supporting governance and accountability is a crucial element of this.

Labour should explore more collaborative approaches in the delivery of ODA, focused specifically on the support and involvement of grassroots community-based initiatives. This should include projects that build the power of local communities to address the root causes of poverty and inequality in their own communities, while protecting their rights to do so. Labour should also use the aid budget to support actors that have been politically marginalised under the current economic order. One way of supporting this would be to make it a condition of all grants (whether to local to international NGOs) that (with funding made available) minority groups are meaningfully consulted in the design of all programmes, and a requirement for NGOs to report on how they are reducing inequality between mainstream and minority groups.

Policy coherence is of course crucial. We endorse the detailed proposals for how this can be achieved that are set out in Labour's 'A world for the many' paper.

The Global Justice Now report, 'Re-imagining UK aid', contains a number of useful recommendations that are relevant to this question:

https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/resources/re-imagining_uk_aid_webpages.pdf

What would a feminist international development policy look like if it is to effectively challenge gender equality?

We support the proposals set out in 'A World for the Many' in this context. In addition, we suggest that in developing this element of its policy, Labour should consult widely with feminist organisations in the Global South.