

## GOAL 17: PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



### STRENGTHEN THE MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND REVITALIZE THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

By Antje Monshausen, Tourism Watch – Bread for the World, and Andy Rutherford, Fresh Eyes – People to People Travel

**ABSTRACT:** *Achieving the ambitious targets of the 2030 Agenda requires a revitalized and enhanced global partnership that brings together governments, civil society, the private sector, the United Nations system and other actors, mobilizing all available resources. The achievement of the 2030 Agenda will depend on fundamental reflections and transformative action on each and every goal (and also some issues that are unfortunately not mentioned in the SDGs). Goal 17 is of special importance as it focuses on systemic issues and means of implementation.*

### INTRODUCTION

Achieving the ambitious targets of the 2030 Agenda requires a revitalized and enhanced global partnership that brings together governments, civil society, the private sector, the United Nations system and other actors, mobilizing all available resources. Meeting implementation targets, including the raising of necessary funds, is key to realizing the 2030 Agenda, as is the full implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development. Increasing support to developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states, is fundamental to equitable progress for all.

“To do this, it is essential to advance the development of needed regulatory frameworks to ensure business operations are fully consistent with human rights, including workers’ rights, incorporate externalities, ensure appropriate taxation of natural resources, re-establish proper relations between the real and financial economies, and promote responsible advertising and marketing, among others. Here significant tension remains between binding regulatory frameworks and voluntary guidelines, with the continued double standard of legally framing investors and other commercially framed rights without equally binding frameworks related to business conduct and responsibilities” (Prato, 2016).

The achievement of the 2030 Agenda will depend on fundamental reflections and transformative action on each and every goal (and also some issues that are unfortunately not mentioned in the SDGs). Goal 17 has a very special importance as it focuses on systemic issues and means of implementation. It is not an understatement to call the means of implementation the “acid test for the 2030 Agenda, as they reveal the true extent of the commitment by all signatories, and particularly the so-called developed countries“ (ibid). The main question is, do the targets and indicators support the necessary transformation or do they amplify the status quo?

## MAJOR CHALLENGES

### Finance

What is often presented as a ‘financial crisis’ is in reality part of a series of interlinked crises – food, energy, climate, human security and environmental degradation – that are devastating the planet, and compounding the poverty and exclusion faced on a daily basis by millions of people across the world. There is a pressing need to reverse the current trends that lead to more inequality and the erosion of people’s fundamental social, economic and political rights. While the finance targets focus mainly on resource mobilization, it is unclear how this could happen. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) is the outcome of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, which took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in July 2015. The AAAA with its narrative of scaling-up resources through leveraging private investment falls short of the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda. This is partly because it leaves the implementation to mechanisms and conditions of private investments and markets instead of regulating them effectively and transforming their modus operandi.

Resource generation is key to implementation, and so is the long overdue achievement of the 0.7 percent goal of rich countries for official development aid (ODA). However, as long as one ODA dollar inflow is outpaced by three dollars leaving the poorest countries through illicit financial outflows, the necessary resources cannot be generated.

Tourism, as many other international business activities, uses aggressive tax optimization and avoidance strategies and enjoys tax exemptions and subsidies by governments. Interestingly, the 2030 Agenda rightly emphasises the need to abolish subsidies that undermine sustainable development in various goals, but fails to clearly mention this in Goal 17 and its targets. Another step is necessary to mobilize additional financial resources in a fair way: the taxation of “public bads”, such as emissions from climate-damaging aviation, and luxury products which cause tremendous ecological and social damage, such as resource intensive forms of tourism.

### Trade

While rightly emphasising the need for preferential rules for least developed countries, the targets in the trade-section of SDG 17 focus mainly on trade liberalization. The 2030 Agenda focuses on multilateral trade systems. However, current reality has already moved a long way from this rhetoric. Countries especially in the old “West” are developing bilateral or regional trade agreements in which governments from the South have a limited or no say.

Target 17.11 focuses on increasing exports from developing countries – especially least developed countries. For tourism this would mean to concentrate on international tourism. This neither reflects the low contribution of international tourism to reducing poverty and inequalities nor the dramatic contribution of aviation-based tourism to climate change. In the context of the SDGs, there is a need to carefully assess if international tourism may be a ‘dangerous option’ for a country, because of the high vulnerability of international tourism to shocks, such as terrorism, conflicts, epidemics, or natural disasters. In addition, the export orientation ignores the advantages of domestic tourism and the value it could potentially add to a sustainable development of destinations.

### Systemic issues

Goal 17 fails to clearly describe the frameworks under which systemic issues could be tackled. Climate change, debt, financial, energy and food crises, which have been caused and compounded by the policies and practices of many governments in both rich and poor countries, and the blanket privileges gained by big domestic and transnational business have caused increasing social polarization between peoples and states.

The dominant development approach over the last decades – based on the deregulation of markets, increasing power of multinational corporations, unaccountable multilateral institutions and trade liberalisation – has failed in its aims to meet the needs and rights of all citizens. This has led to a hollowing out of democratic accountability as elites make decisions and implement policies with little or no scrutiny from citizens, creating the conditions for poverty, inequality, environmental devastation and growing social unrest. There is a deeply felt need for new people-centred policies and practices.

## TANGIBLE WAYS FORWARD

### Multi-stakeholder partnerships

The powers of transnational corporations have become even more entrenched as ‘corporate capture’ of governance and policy processes spreads to more political arenas, giving business significant control over our lives and livelihoods.

Instead of defining the clear responsibilities and accountabilities of this shadow-stakeholder, Goal 17 is describing the progressive role of the private sector in building partnerships for sustainable development. It fails to define regulatory frameworks which could ensure business operations that are fully consistent with human rights. “A successful implementation of the SDGs will only be possible if we look beyond the positive aspects of private sector engagement, and truly address the negative social and environmental repercussions of business activity,” says Jerome Chaplier, Coordinator of the European Coalition for Corporate Justice (ECCJ, 2016).

Civil society is also mentioned as an important partner, but at no place are the structural difficulties of social movements, citizens’ groups and organisations and NGOs being equal participants in policy and decision making processes highlighted. In addition, the power imbalances between private sector actors and civil society are not addressed.

Global, regional and national partnerships need to be developed and strengthened to implement people-centred responses to the current crises in an effective and responsible manner. Priority must be given to poor, excluded and marginalised people and more dem-

ocratic and accountable institutions must be in place to assure that processes and measures will lead to a just, equal, inclusive and sustainable world based on respect for gender equality and the promotion and protection of human, economic and socio-cultural rights and environmental security.

While there are concerns that Goal 17 in general is not progressive enough, that it is vague, focussing on wrong priorities and addressing only half of the reality – it is even more problematic with respect to tourism. The transformation of our world is not possible without the transformation of tourism. The following points are proposed for a transformation of tourism:

### **Changing perspectives on tourism**

The unequal power relations within tourism between sending countries and destinations and, at core, between guests and hosts, remain a fundamental challenge. In addition to the establishment of participatory planning and monitoring in which host communities have 'real power', there is a pressing need to promote and ensure responsible advertising and marketing by all tour companies, tourism boards and agencies. Apart from being culturally respectful and promoting positive and non-exploitative images of people, there is a need to promote guests' and hosts' expectations built on partnership, respect and equality. It is also important to present non-extractivist images of host communities and environments. In order to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, perspectives, expectations and advertising and marketing need to shift from a guest and business orientation where tourism and travel is a commodity to an approach which is people to people focussed. This is where local communities and environments and their needs are centre stage.

### **Participation in tourism governance**

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has no functioning participation mechanism for civil society organisations and victims and survivors of adverse tourism development. It is dominated by private sector interests. In the light of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the non-functioning implementation mechanism (§10) of UNWTO's Global Code of Ethics for Tourism has to be further developed to become a remedy mechanism for affected people and communities.

There is also a lack of participation at national and local levels. Tourism development and investment plans have to be consulted on, and effective participation and monitoring mechanisms should be established and implemented.

### **Regulatory framework on business and human rights**

At the international level the tourism and travel industry, as with all industries which have a significant influence of transnational corporations, has been able to operate with limited legal and fiscal constraints. This has led to a significant democratic deficit. Addressing this and establishing binding mechanisms for accountability to operate respecting and adhering to national and international laws and agreements, is one important foundation for partnership building. There is a growing movement across continents to work with the United Nations to establish a binding international instrument to address human rights abuses committed by transnational corporations and other business enterprises. In June 2014, The UN Human Rights Council agreed to launch negotiations towards a legally binding international framework on business and human rights and create an international body to judge and sanction them (TNI, 2015). Support for this process is a fundamental aspect of partnership building.



### Holding tourism liable for its environmental and social costs

If social and environmental externalities of tourism are taken into account, they could be an important means to raise funds for sustainable development. The taxation of “public bads” e.g. CO2 emissions, land use or loss of biodiversity might be an important tool. The closing of tax loopholes, as well as the ending of any tax exemptions for companies and investors, would also enable the flow of additional public revenues.

### Measuring tourism’s impacts adequately

The indicators regarding tourism in the SDGs are completely inappropriate to assess the impacts of tourism on sustainable development. For example, there is no logical connection between “Tourism direct GDP as proportion of total GDP and in growth rates” or “the number of jobs in tourism industry as a proportion of total jobs” (indicators 8.9.1 and 8.9.2) and the corresponding target 8.9 “By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.” What becomes clear is that the tourism indicators are focusing only on growth, an approach that has serious, proven negative side effects. At the local level, national statistics will not help to monitor effects. Governments need to develop mechanisms for introducing and assessing destination-based indicators and community-monitoring. The restriction to focus only on those targets where tourism is mentioned falls short. Tourism is directly connected with all SDGs. This has to be reflected in the monitoring mechanisms and processes.

### Partnerships for peace, security and dignity

There is a widespread and growing understanding that inequalities are creating insiders and outsiders from concentrations of power and wealth. Fractured economies have consolidated divisive and polarizing politics. The growth of racism and xenophobia is corroding social relations and contributing to already pronounced democratic deficits. In a number of countries there is a perceived shrinking of democratic spaces. Change towards more just, equal and inclusive societies is urgently required.

Our governments have the responsibility to ensure that we can all live in peace, security and dignity. Partnerships need to be developed between citizens and their governments for the creation and implementation of profound and creative solutions needed for people-centred recovery and change and to ensure that travel and tourism make a positive contribution to a more just, equal and inclusive world.

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