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## *The importance of measuring PCSD for the 2030 Agenda*

### **5.1. A NEW PARADIGM SEEKING ITS MEASUREMENTS AND PRESCRIPTIONS**

In the institutional and academic sphere, it is generally believed that economic growth as it is currently measured does not properly reflect the progress and setbacks of countries' development processes (OECD, 2013 y 2017a; Stiglitz et al., 2013; PNUD, 2016; Raworth, 2017), especially if viewed from the sustainability of life perspective (Pérez Orozco, 2012).

However, its use as the main prescriber of public policy remains practically uncontested since, as has been openly acknowledged, alternative measures that overcome the obvious limitations of GDP while offering similar ease of use as a prescriber have yet to be developed. We will begin by focusing on the limitations and the most widespread criticism of GDP, and conclude by addressing issues related to potential new prescribers.

The limitations of economic growth measured on the basis of the evolution of real GDP<sup>13</sup> as a measure of the progress, development or well-being of a country date back to the neo-classical concept of the economy. Conventional economic theory has led us to believe that economic phenomena always refer to a state of equilibrium in which rational individuals optimize their preferences. This requires (assuming) two types of abstraction that should not go unnoticed.

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**13.** For the time being, we are overlooking the difference between nominal and real GDP, and the fact that there are at least three different accepted ways of calculating a country's GDP. These differences have no significant bearing on the arguments we are about to present.

The first abstraction springs from our interest in mathematical models to analyse and compare economic phenomena such as productivity and growth in our countries. This type of abstraction is a common tool for the development of science. The problem here, however, is that no mathematical model takes account of those aspects of reality that cannot be quantified. The success of this sort of modelling depends on its ability to summarize and obtain results as similar as possible to the way reality truly behaves. The risk is that a historically consolidated indicator fails to take into account that this reality evolves and continues to function as the main interpreter which means that it is no longer functioning as a model but rather as a limitation or hindrance holding us back from a deeper understanding of our reality.

As with so many other quantifiers, it is believed that annual GDP variation must be positive for there to be economic growth, otherwise the economy would be considered to be in recession. Therefore, under this abstraction it is concluded that in order to prosper a country's GDP must be higher than the previous year, and so on over the course of time. One might ask, what is the maximum GDP that a country can or should reach? The problem is that this question does not make sense from a mathematical standpoint, nor from the standpoint of economics as a formal science, reducible to its mathematical expression. This is the second abstraction.

It is precisely the second abstraction, imposed by the concept of economic growth, that involves considering economic

phenomena as dynamic and formal relationships. In other words, isolated from the historical, social and environmental nature of these processes. Therefore, based on the system used to calculate GDP, the variables with which the economic growth of a country is calculated are limited to consumption expenditure, investment expenditure, value added from sales, total salary costs and gross operating surplus. These are all monetized variables that are comparable between countries regardless of their point in history, social needs or environmental challenges faced within their borders —and in the world as a whole— depending on each particular situation.

Therefore, when we use GDP to compare levels of development or countries' wealth, we are only comparing a very limited aspect of the realities of these countries. Because we are not considering all the non-monetized economic and social relationships, because relationships of commercial or financial dependence between countries are not included and, perhaps most importantly, because GDP does not take account of the environmental costs of economic production, or of unpaid or care work performed mostly by women. The result is that the limits to economic growth imposed by natural ecosystems and social power relationships that for decades have been identified in multiple studies conducted in different academic areas are likewise ignored (Meadows, 1972; Bruntland, 1986; Georgescu-Roegen, 1971; Martínez Alier, 1995; Jiménez Herrero, 1997).

It is necessary to establish devices to measure development processes that have been acknowledged as multidimensional and transnational

Already back in 2009, the critical review and GDP expansion project spearheaded by economists Amartya Sen, Jean Paul Fitoussi and Joseph Stiglitz, clearly affirmed that due to threats arising from all sorts of “financial, economic, social, and environmental disasters (...), we must change the way we live, consume and produce. We must change the criteria governing our social organizations and our public policies” (Stiglitz et al, 2013). To that end, they suggest modifying certain criteria used to calculate GDP, such introducing averages and analysing by quintiles to take distribution into account, not considering all in-kind transfers made by states as expense but rather considering their results (educational and health systems, for example), and including issues such as the use of time, leisure, travel and subjective perceptions of well-being.

In short, the aim is to replace an indicator focused on monetized production with another that takes account of well-being. If the former is related to the latter, it should be included based on certain conditions, i.e. computed as a contribution to well-being when this is the case. Similarly, however, from the perspective of sustainable development as a complex and interrelated process, we must assume that monetized production dynamics could negatively impact these processes depending on their circumstances and effects.

The basic driving force behind that and other efforts we are making through the construction of the PCSDI is the need to establish devices to measure development processes that have been acknowledged as multidimensional and transnational.

## 5.2. NEW MEASUREMENTS INTER-RELATING ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SPHERES

The fact that over the last few years many attempts have been made to establish new measurements taking a multidimensional approach to the phenomenon of development is the best proof that it is not only relevant but also crucial to better understanding our reality. Over the last decade, the number of national and international initiatives in this regard has grown exponentially and such initiatives are supported by the international community’s most important and representative institutions<sup>14</sup>.

For our purposes here, we will only analyse two of the most representative ones developed and supported by the United Nations and the OECD. This is not a comprehensive analysis but rather a look at those elements that characterize the shared concern about obtaining new indicators for processes that truly must be monitored from a multidimensional perspective. However, we were able to draw some conclusions from the analysis that are useful in heightening awareness and considering crucial aspects that must be incorporated into the new development measures properly incorporating multi-dimensionality.

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**14.** There are dozens of countries that have applied numerous methodologies and are working on multidimensional approaches to evaluate their development processes and influence public policy. For a summary of some of them, see cases in Latin America, UNDP (2016). Another summary with a wider range of countries is the Global Happiness Council (2018), pp. 200-245.

Based on the capabilities approach as a vector of human development developed by Amartya Sen, Professor Sabina Alkire developed the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)<sup>15</sup> incorporating a battery of social indicators and establishing three tiers of indicators: poverty, vulnerability and sustainability. These three tiers relate functioning and achievements to the capabilities required to obtain them. This system of multidimensional indicators of poverty and human development<sup>16</sup> enables more precise focusing of public policies on the different geographical, demographic and collective realities found in any country.

This approach has been adopted by the UNDP in some of its latest regional reports, such as the Regional Report on Human Development for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNDP, 2016). In this report, the three levels of indicators suggested by the multidimensional approach constitute different scales that enable different ways of monitoring total shortcomings, situations of vulnerability and, in the most consolidated part of development processes, those situations that help ensure the sustainability of achievements. “In the poverty baskets, sustainability and resilience to vulnerability are reflected in the construction of a series of development steps with a multidimensional focus” (UNDP, 2016).

But, as the UNDP acknowledges, “In the design and implementation of such policies, another particular challenge arises in the form of finding the points at which these policies intersect. (...) Multidimensional problems require multidimensional solutions. A new policy architecture must be developed that goes beyond a sectoral focus, articulates territorial strategies between different levels of Governments, constructs policies for different stages of the life cycle, and fosters greater citizen participation” (UNDP, 2016).

The UNDP’s 2016 report for Latin America clearly states that the main transformations observed in the last decade and a half in the

region are the reduction of monetary poverty and a timid emergence of the middle class. Both phenomena result from changes in the income pyramids. However, in terms of health indicators, basic services and education, the region is ahead of where one might expect based solely on income.

This pattern, examples of which can be found around the world in one direction or the other, shows that “GDP is a measurement of national income and not of a population’s well-being. This constitutes the starting point on the pathway towards a multidimensional approach to public policy” (UNDP, 2016). Underpinning the changes measured in terms of income in any given country, we find transitions beyond income that show multiple processes of social, economic and environmental change. Progress has been systematically underestimated because of the use of GDP per capita as a proxy for well-being (UNDP, 2016). Just the opposite is true when we look at the status of fundamental social and environmental indicators as the use of GDP overestimates development levels by not incorporating income distribution or its relation to access to services, nor does it incorporate environmental deterioration, depletion of natural resources or the devastating effects their consequences have on the sustainability of life.

**15.** Research conducted as part of the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and published globally by the UNDP in 2010.

**16.** Since 2010, the UNDP has been publishing the HDI and the HDI corrected by gender as a proposal for indicators and baskets for resilience to vulnerability and for sustainability of achievements.

The OECD also recognizes the limitations of economic change data measured in terms of income. The editorial in its fourth report on measuring well-being explicitly states that “there is concern that the economic shifts in the last 30-40 years have left too many people behind. With the crisis as its backdrop, the ‘beyond GDP’ movement has drawn attention to the limits of macroeconomic statistics in describing what matters most to the quality of people’s lives. This has encouraged us to ask both who and what aspects of life are missing from the traditional indicators that policy-makers most often use to guide their decisions” (OECD, 2017a).

This report is part of another noteworthy example of new studies and analyses to better understand and measure the multidimensional development processes that the OECD has been leading since 2011. It is called the *Better Lives Initiative*<sup>17</sup>. It is based on different hypotheses that incorporate elements of the human development approach though not embracing it as the main element<sup>18</sup>. The OECD approach aims to define which dimensions other than income are relevant to understanding the processes of what it calls development or social progress. To that end, it prepares and puts forward for consideration 11 dimensions of life that would provide the best approximation to what it considers to be well-being, combining material conditions and quality of life<sup>19</sup>. To include an intergenerational perspective, the index also considers four capital stocks relevant to future well-being<sup>20</sup>. To measure all these dimensions and resources, the index consists of 50 selected indicators that apply to 42 countries (the 36 OECD members and 6 partner countries)<sup>21</sup>.

The main conclusions of the OECD reports are that this type of multidimensional measurement highlights the importance of inequalities involved in promoting and understanding well-being, deemed to impact all indicators as data is disaggregated by gender and age group. Moreover, regarding

vertical inequalities, seven of the 11 dimensions are also analysed according to the breakdown of the socioeconomic status of the population in each country (OECD, 2017a).

Although it is not the purpose here to conduct an in-depth critique of the initiatives that we have mentioned in relation to multidimensional measurements, it is worth mentioning how the Better Life Initiative includes the environment as a dimension of development. As already mentioned, the index considers 11 dimensions and four resources. Of the 11 dimensions, only one refers to environmental issues, so-called environmental quality, expressed in two indicators: air quality and water quality. The methodological key to sustainability resides in including the likelihood of sustained well-being as defined by the index, without assessing whether or not the levels of well-being of OECD countries can be extended to the rest of the planet.

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**17.** How’s life? is part of the OECD’s Better Life Initiative launched on the occasion of its 50th anniversary. The initiative undertakes to promote “Better policies for better lives”, in line with the organization’s mission. One of the pillars of the initiative is the Your better life index ([www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org](http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org)), an interactive composite index of well-being that aims to engage citizens in the debate on social progress.

**18.** For a detailed explanation of the OECD’s welfare approach, its inspiration from the concepts of functioning and capabilities of human development and its particular interpretation, see OECD (2013; 22).

**19.** The dimensions for material conditions are housing, income and wealth, and job and earnings; and for quality of life: community, education, environment, civic engagement, health, life satisfaction, safety, and work-life balance.

**20.** They are: natural capital, human capital, economic capital and social capital.

**21.** See the database at <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=BLI#>

To that end, in its 2013 and 2015 editions, the OECD defines and details the conceptualization of economic, natural, human and social resources it introduces into the explanatory matrix of the index in the form of capital, but not in the calculation of the indicators that comprise it. Truth be told, however, while its definition of natural capital is based on the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting<sup>22</sup>, it only collects information related to natural capital assets and ignores the other two main elements of the system which we view as fundamental for a proper multidimensional approach to development: environmental flows and economic activity impacting the environment. Hence, the definition of natural capital in the OECD index does not take stock of emissions or waste management, two issues among many that are extremely relevant for a full multidimensional understanding of today's sustainable development processes.

This may be related to the fact that the OECD's conceptualization of environmental sustainability focuses on the development of the green growth concept. In this vein and incomprehensibly separate from the Better Life Initiative, it publishes the Green Growth Index comprising 16 indicators, including some that measure emissions and waste (OECD, 2017b). The report features alarming data related to environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, resource depletion, water and air pollution, and so forth. However, as it only covers OECD countries, it simply concludes that most of these countries are still net importers of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The green growth approach is based on the desire to decouple economic growth and emissions and harmful impacts to the environment. The report does acknowledge that emissions have not yet begun to drop. In fact, emissions continue to rise but at a slower rate than GDP growth such that global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2015 are 58% higher than in 1990 (OECD, 2017b).

Although the approach suggested in the report apparently aims to maintain the economic growth indicator as the main measurement of prosperity, when that growth is compared with the green indicators, it has no choice but to recognize the real challenge being faced in achieving a comprehensive and truly multidimensional vision of development processes: "Important challenges remain, to better safeguard our natural resources and further reduce the environmental footprint of our consumption and production. Beyond relative decoupling, economic growth must be completely untied from environmental pressures (absolute decoupling)" (OECD, 2017b).

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**22.** Developed by the United Nations statistical unit in collaboration with the European Commission, the OECD, the IMF, the FAO and the World Bank. It can be found at <https://seea.un.org/content/seea-central-framework>

It seems that we are facing a dilemma insofar as we can either continue trying to progress in this decoupling without harming economic growth or start thinking about ruling out economic growth as a measure of progress precisely because, owing to the way it is built as an indicator, it is decoupled from the natural underpinning that any development process has or will have. In short, we should stop trying to make reality resemble our conventions and start building conventions to more truly reflect reality.

We have observed that efforts are being made to understand and measure development, taking its multidimensional nature into account. All efforts in this regard, those mentioned here and others, are soon destined to configure a new framework of public policy priorities and recommendations, just as GDP and income calculations have over the last several decades.

In any event, we highlight the UNDP's suggestion that what is important is to identify and establish relationships and links between the different dimensions, that is, those intersecting areas that serve as evidence and constitute the basis for multidimensional measurement and whose mathematical abstraction best resembles countries' true performance. It seems that significant progress has been made by institutions and countries in recognizing development's social dimension, as seen in the issue of inequality's increasing importance in the public agenda.

Similarly, an increase in concern and information regarding the environmental dimension of development can be observed, although the measurement proposals have not managed to incorporate the criticality shown by the dramatic values for environmental indicators. The shortcomings of the proposed measurement proposals are probably related to a narrow interpretation of the multidimensional concept, i.e. one that recognizes the need to add dimensions to understand the processes, but that has not

yet dared to explore the details of their interrelated nature. It is safe to say that we are at a time when it is more important to explore how the different dimensions relate to one another. This not only leads to criticising any perspective that implicitly or explicitly imposes hierarchies among them, but also to establishing the nature and extent to which economic, social, environmental and political factors relate to one another.

There is one more aspect, also difficult to measure, but which is virtually missing in the proposals observed: the inescapably transnational nature of sustainable development processes (Keating, 2001; Strange, 2001; Ugalde, 2006; Martínez Osés and Martínez, 2016; Millán, 2013).

If we intend to better understand how public policies can contribute to devising and advancing these processes, we can no longer limit ourselves to a strictly domestic or national scope. The next heading addresses this question.

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### 5.3. OVERCOMING NORTH-SOUTH THINKING AS AN IMPERATIVE GIVEN THE TRANSNATIONALISATION OF DEVELOPMENT

It is very difficult to isolate oneself from six decades of development theory and practice when reflecting on development. Since the mid-twentieth century when these theories emerged, they have been closely tied to a vision of the world divided between developed countries and those aspiring to development. Discourse and practice focused on analysing development as an eminently national process in which national public policies would be primarily responsible for achieving that status. It therefore makes sense that analyses and proposals are generally national or domestic and even to this day a national methodological view prevails when it comes to development issues (Beck, 2005).

However, international studies have emerged addressing these issues in tandem with progress made in development studies and practices. The fields of international cooperation, international trade, international finance, geopolitics and international political economy, among others, have analysed international relations which have gradually gained traction in providing possibilities (and thwarting) national development processes. The very concept of cooperation in international relations arises from the need to coordinate, complement and integrate national political action when tackling international challenges.

However, in recent decades increasing amounts of evidence point to the transnational nature of development issues. And this is not only owing to evidence stemming from increased awareness of ecological factors which obviously transcend political boundaries established by states, but also because of the impact that national policies have on other territories and on the various dimensions of development. These impacts have shown that development is

determined by a host of interdependencies and interrelations over and above national concerns. Recognition of the global and interdependent nature of development processes is possibly one of the greatest contributions made by the 2030 Agenda.

Unlike its predecessor, the millennium agenda, this new international agenda asserts its universal nature and challenges all countries to transform their development models so as to make them compatible with those of other countries and future generations. Hence, it is no longer a matter of appealing to countries to continue progressing their own development processes to climb a hypothetical pyramid with privileged countries at the top, but rather something more complex: transforming national development and basing it on a new universal rationale that thus encompasses a global view of transnational interrelationships and interdependencies. This means establishing the shared responsibilities of all countries

and defining the different roles that each country plays in that shared responsibility. Embracing this new way of understanding development challenges requires a radically different view on national public policy and the responsibilities of states vis-à-vis those challenges.

The change that is needed calls into question the widely held principle that the responsibility of our governing class is circumscribed within national borders, even when foreign policy, based on the interests of that same group of citizens, is implemented in the field of international relations. Assuming that countries have a global responsibility means more than assuming that they have another responsibility in addition to the real one. It invites them to rethink that responsibility from a transnational perspective. This poses limitations but also opens up a new range of possibilities. The point is that limitations and possibilities no longer refer to situations measured solely based on national interests. They require a new global frame of reference. Building that global frame of reference constitutes a challenge in any attempt to measure sustainable development processes such as the one at hand.

Less progress has been made in this regard than in exploring the multidimensionality of development. The OECD itself recently recognized that “measuring OECD countries’ transboundary effects is a complex undertaking” (OECD, 2019) and is only an estimate which it acknowledges is very basic, although it announces the forthcoming publication of a study to move forward on this issue. While there is no denying the limitations in terms of focus and availability of data with which to measure the transnational effects of public policy, the OECD essentially recognises the need to broaden the approach, as “transboundary effects could be considered in all situations when any country is affecting any other country, in any way, and at any time”.

Development’s interdependent nature indicates that these transnational effects of political action will always exist and can be more easily observed from a multidimensional perspective. Therefore, regardless of whether they are designed to address domestic or international issues we will somehow have to start including the global responsibility of national public policy in our measurements. In other words, when analysing public policy, the aim should be to replace a national methodological approach with a cosmopolitan one.

#### 5.4. TAKING THE PCSD APPROACH TO UNDERSTAND INTERSECTORAL AND TRANSNATIONAL LINKAGES

The PCSD approach has enormous potential for the new public policy framework required. Shortly after the 2030 Agenda was approved, Amina Mohamed<sup>23</sup> stated that policy coherence constitutes an imperative since understanding and addressing agreed goals requires the coherent organisation of a wide range of policies that shape sustainable development (OECD, 2015).

The main contribution of the OECD in relation to the potential of the approach was developed by its policy coherence unit, introducing the concept of Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development which moves away from a narrow vision of coherence to incorporate a global perspective on how the policies of all countries affect sustainable development.

The 2015 policy coherence report sustains that we need to move beyond monitoring frameworks focused on institutional mechanisms and incorporate at least three other interrelated elements: interactions between policies, contextual factors and the effects that policies have on the well-being of people (OECD, 2015).

The PCSD's expanded approach falls in line with a comprehensive, multidimensional and cosmopolitan vision of development, thus moving away from those sectoral North-South policy approaches based on methodological nationalism.

The PCSD approach can be especially useful in systematically analysing and understanding the responsibilities that countries have in promoting global sustainable development given that it considers development to involve processes entailing a complex logic that requires examining the cross-sectoral, multidimensional and transnational implications that public policy has for development. Hence it is instrumental in analysing development processes by observing their interactions —often contradictions— rather than by a supposed constant approximation to an ideally preconfigured result (Martínez Osés and Gil Payno, 2016).

The PCSD approach basically means promoting openness to change policies based on sustainability of life, equity and justice and global responsibility criteria. Using the PCSD approach to measure multidimensional and transnational development processes means that we are working with ongoing processes that cannot be analysed through a narrow, technocratic lens in a debate divorced from political reality (Van Seters et al., 2015). The PCSD approach prioritises analysing the structures and dynamics of development produced by certain power relations underlying policy (Siitonen, 2016).

<sup>23</sup>. As from 2012, Amina Mohamed was a special advisor to the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon, in charge of coordinating the 2030 Agenda development process. She is a specialist in development and the environment and has worked with philanthropic institutions such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. In 2016 she was appointed as Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations by the current Secretary General, António Guterres.

The PCSD approach basically means promoting openness to change policies based on sustainability of life, equity and justice and global responsibility criteria

As we discussed in a preparatory analysis of the first edition of the PCDI in 2016, “The PCD approach presupposes a conception whereby development is the result of a political process that is resolved in the constant integration and interaction that occurs in the social, economic and environmental dimensions of configured reality. It is not conceived as an aggregate of dimensions but rather as a structure involving interactions and interconnections of cross-cutting dynamics that are part of and parcel of a complex system. The universality and environmental sustainability of development impose explicit limitations on the development process. Based on this, criteria can be established to assess whether or not the policy results or impacts are consistent with such a conception of development. Thus, for example, economic growth as the direct result of certain policies, as if it were infinite and disconnected from its material underpinning and social effects, can only be conceived through a single-dimension rationale, making it fictional. In short, if what we intend to measure is policy coherence with multi-dimensionally conceived development, as established under the concept of human and sustainable development, it would appear to be indispensable to do so based on criteria that determine the extent to which policies contribute to personal capacity-building and to which they guarantee the capacities of other people in other latitudes and that of all future generations” (Martínez Osés and Gil Payno, 2016).

The PCSD’s four analytical dimensions (Millán, 2012) enable us to delve into the multidimensionality of development, i.e. intersection between policies, the intermestic and transnational nature of all policies while analysing the behaviour of all government action, i.e. the whole of government approach, with the necessary long-term view that development transformations require, i.e. they must take an intergenerational approach, and at the same time analyse each policy’s contribution to development, that is, internal coherence.

The combined analysis suggested by the PCSD approach allows us to measure policy coherence while devising a multidimensional, transnational measurement tool to examine the political processes that shape sustainable development.

### **5.5. MOVING BEYOND THE HEGEMONY OF GDP TO MEASURE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE 2030 AGENDA**

As we have seen, the approval of the 2030 Agenda explicitly poses new challenges for systems that measure and evaluate progress in development. The appeals that the 2030 Agenda makes to universality and sustainability point to the need to profoundly transform the current models of development, production and consumption, and to redistribute and share out resources and policy results. These transformations invite us to come up with a much more comprehensive and interrelated way of understanding and assessing public policy in relation to its effects on development. It is an ambitious agenda that, despite its profound contradictions, responds to a world view marked by interdependencies — blurring the borders and profiles of the various actors— and the transnational nature of development challenges (Martínez Osés and Gil Payno, 2016).

**The 2030 Agenda explicitly poses new challenges for systems that measure and evaluate progress in development**

Each of the SDGs and their targets are important, but in order to determine whether the 2030 Agenda will ultimately be successful, we must use a different approach to evaluate its performance. To fulfil this agenda, we need to pay attention to the essence of its holistic and interrelated framework. As suggested by the group of experts selected by the United Nations Secretary General who were entrusted with coordinating the preparation of the *Global Sustainable Development Report*<sup>24</sup> to be published in the coming months, we need to ask ourselves whether there will be greater systemic transformation by addressing the interrelationships between various SDGs, and whether we are going to implement a new form of governance where international flows of resources, people and money will be fair. If the answers to these questions were affirmative, it would be fair to say that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda will have been a success and that we will have taken a step forward on the path towards true sustainable development<sup>25</sup>.

Indeed, the new public policy architecture will be tested with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda provided that the three fundamental principles on which it is built are upheld: a) universality, which does not imply uniformity but rather differentiation; b) integration, which involves harmonizing economic, social, environmental and political dimensions and, c) the full inclusion of all people. As the UNDP warns, two sources of tension make it difficult to implement the 2030 Agenda: “Firstly, the act of privileging one objective over another and developing a partial agenda, within which the holistic nature of the objectives and targets is curtailed; and secondly, the task of designing sectoral policies for each objective or set of targets. Both will fragment the agenda into a series of bureaucratic challenges that will increase the scattering of efforts” (UNDP, 2016).

One way of reducing this tension is to fully integrate the 2030 Agenda principles into national development plans and budgets,

thereby generating a holistic dialogue between the dimensions at the heart of public development policies. This mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda principles into the set of overall public policies falls in line with the PCSD approach as it allows for the analysis, assessment and, where appropriate, rectification of each public policy outcome based on a multidimensional, transnational view of development. This gives rise to a universal, integrated and inclusive public agenda.

Thus, the challenge begins by effectively replacing one-dimensional progress or development measuring devices, particularly those based on income. The transformations and changes advocated by the 2030 Agenda require, first of all, a profound transformation of the measurements used to assess the performance of countries and societies, without losing sight of global performance. The urgent transformation pursued by the 2030 Agenda “requires a more complex and multidimensional approach, given that both

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**24.** The *Global Sustainable Development Report* (GSDR) is an initiative stemming from paragraph 83 of the 2030 Agenda which asserts the need to monitor the Agenda from a holistic and global perspective. The report should incorporate scientific evidence taking a multidisciplinary approach in line with the multiple sustainable development dimensions to reflect the 2030 Agenda’s indivisible and integrated nature. These reports will be delivered to the High Level Forum to monitor the SDGs. In 2014 a prototype report was drawn up and in 2015 and 2016 two further reports were published. But that year the decision was made to henceforth publish a four-year report for which a panel of experts was appointed. This panel of experts is trying in a certain way to reproduce the link between science and politics based on the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) model so that scientific evidence can more directly impact sustainable development policies. The publication of the next report focused on the analysis of transformations is announced for 2019. See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/globalsdreport/2019>

**25.** See the GSDR blog post signed by one of the responsible experts, Eeva Furman, of the Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE), Finland. See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/globalsdreport/2019>

material opportunities and mechanisms must be created, along with a questioning of socially accepted standards and values that validate certain hierarchies that should not necessarily exist.” (UNDP, 2016).

For its part, we have seen that the OECD tool designed to measure well-being recognizes that it fails to contemplate two issues that are found in the 2030 Agenda. On the one hand, the multidimensional proposal of the OECD does not incorporate any of the means of implementation, since it is built on outcomes and not on the public policies needed to obtain them. On the other hand, the OECD recognises that it does not incorporate any indicator to consider the principle of all countries’ shared responsibility in managing resources and public goods, thereby preventing them from being negatively impacted (OECD, 2017b). It is not by chance that the OECD index avoids considerations related to the political dimension of development. This is consistent with its basic hypothesis on economic development where it does not normally examine power relations.

In short and as a conclusive summary, these new measurement tools to obtain new valuations must respond to three interrelated criteria: first, they must incorporate a multidimensional approach exploring the links and relationships between the different dimensions of the development processes. Here, it is vitally important to avoid incorporating the environmental dimension superficially, merely painting a few green brush strokes on the current processes and development models. Its very nature as a natural dimension on which all other processes and dynamics are based forces us to urgently and radically consider currently observed trends towards depletion and fragility.

Second, the North-South dichotomy must be replaced and upgraded by a transnational vision that incorporates the general principle of shared but differentiated responsibilities,

which necessarily requires an assessment framework proportional to the intensity of public policy impacts and their environmental consequences.

Third, the human rights approach needs to be adopted as way of ensuring no one is left behind such that its progressive nature serves as an important indicator when assessing public policy results.

Lastly, we have observed that numerous efforts are being made to devise new indexes and instruments to more accurately measure development processes without stunting their multidimensionality and transnationality. But we also observe that the old income and revenue based yardsticks, while reflecting a neoclassical view of the economy for which no reality check has actually been performed, continue to inordinately influence political decision-makers. This owes both to their simplifying power —making them highly useable— and the power relationship between the economic, political and social actors shaping our era. Therefore, their gradual replacement with new indicators and public policy prescribers that are more firmly rooted in reality will depend on our ability to technically and statistically develop them and to transform the current power relations upholding GDP as an uncontested idol.

If power relationships and the common worldview underpinning them remain as they are, changes in the patterns of production, distribution and consumption of goods that are so important in determining our current development models will not be achieved

Overcoming the hegemony of income represented by GDP symbolizes in itself the great transformation of our time. Again, this transformation will not depend solely on how much data we are able to collect and how we can combine them to better recreate the reality of multidimensional and transnational sustainable development. As experts warn “At a deeper level, the very notions of progress, well-being and development need to be redefined. Rather than being one-dimensional paths of progress, they entail changes in power relations and the collective worldview of the rights and aspirations of citizens” (UNDP, 2016).

As we have seen, despite more and better approaches to sustainable development processes, there are still important technical and statistical shortcomings that need to be addressed. But the OECD also states that, in addition to needs for research and investment to achieve better approaches, “there is an urgent need to bridge the gap between better data and better lives. This means greater commitment from decision-makers to use the data that we already have. This is not simply a question of statistics: it means linking numbers to real-world impact and experience and developing policies that can bridge well-being divides. Indeed, the question now is not just: how big are the gaps? – but rather, how can we design policies that will close the gaps that matter most and deliver well-being for all” (OECD; 2017a). To which we would add: Why not try to identify those power relationships that, if not modified, could stand in the way of establishing the policies that can close the gaps?

Stated otherwise, when we talk about a shared transformation agenda for sustainable development, we cannot ignore the eminently political nature of this transformation. If power relationships and the common worldview underpinning them remain as they are, changes in the

patterns of production, distribution and consumption of goods that are so important in determining our current development models will not be achieved.

Recently, New Zealand’s head of government announced that her country rejected GDP as the main indicator by which to establish its political objectives and announced the country’s first national budget guided by the concept of well-being. This is undoubtedly a step in the right direction which should be followed by other countries and furthered by generating alternatives to build a new framework of progress for humanity as a whole.

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