

UN- Report Nairobi.

The period 2014/2015 was remarkably exciting to many organizations and development partners within the frame work of international operation. It was a period of summarizing the robust debate on the final review of MDGs and transition to the Social Development Goals (SDGs) concept. IFSW representation at UN-HABITAT was centrally engaged in this debate by virtue of being a member of two preparatory committees. Unlike during the Habitat 1 and Habitat 11 where MDGs were designed, agreed and concluded by a team of experts in a boardroom, Habitat 111 which designed the SDGs used an open negotiation process, involving 193 UN member states, civil society groups, private sector and several other state holders. The MDGs had 8 Goals and 21 targets and specifically targeted the developing countries, the SDGs have 17 Goals and 169 targets and focus on the entire world, the rich and the poor, building vastly on the momentum generated by MDGs, by including identical targets.

As a Federation and social workers in both practice, academia and in research we may pose a few questions here;

Of what critical concern are SDGs to us?

Do they reflect our ambitions and standpoint?

Do we own them?

If we do, how can we engage effectively in our different work situations?

A look at two aspects of UN-HABITAT as an entity might provide a direction towards the answers. The aspects are; the scope of UN-HABITAT's overall mandate and two, its consultation and decision making process.

UN-Habitat overall mandate (**The Habitat Agenda**) is focused on sustainable urbanization and advocacy for adequate shelter, In broader terms the global mandate covers *the state of urban*

governance, urban economy, basic services, water and sanitation, housing, risk reduction and safety. Its work is currently spread over 70 countries in the global South it has the highest level of policy and a range of specific technical knowledge in all the specified areas.

According to UN report quoted elsewhere, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the world population today live in cities and by the year 2050, 7 out 10 people will be living in cities and towns. Today, most of social work service consumers and providers are based in cities and towns. Similarly, slums, which are the most glaring signs of poverty and inequality are based in cities where the urban poor have a less chance of finding a job, their life expectancy at birth is lower, children are unlikely to enroll in school and occurrence of ill health is noticeable and more frequent. Public facilities used by the urban poor are more often than not overcrowded, poorly equipped and often badly managed. Many cities are vulnerable to severe impacts of earthquakes, tsunamis, landslides, storms and hurricanes all caused by effects of climate change. Social workers in disaster management would attest to the fact that several cities and towns are not resilient enough to reinforce the human resilience to withstand or mitigate impacts of human made crises.

The complexity of competing economic interest which lead to alienation and deprivation of the vulnerable groups are more noticeable in cities and spill over to peri urban areas and eventually to the rural communities. I therefore argue that the SDGs from the Habitat Agenda viewpoint are complimentary to social work aspirations and underscore major concerns in all the different settings where social work is practiced.

As to whether the SDGs really captured the social work expectations, one need to look at the multi disciplinary entities involved in their design and formulation; civil society actors, professionals, grassroots communities, private sector and of course the governments. The process was thorough consultative and inclusive. The principles of equality, participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment, rule of law and social inclusion

all which underpin the social work values are clearly integrated and captured unlike in the MDGs. As to whether social work really owns the goals, an analysis of the phraseology and the jargon used is typical and consistent with the social work language and narratives – ***just and inclusive, promote peace, global participation, reduce inequality, inclusivity, end hunger and poverty, gender equality etc etc***. Clearly, the SDGs cuts across the multiplicity of social work activities while the targets lays down realistic benchmarks for the evaluation of the outcomes.

There is a clear roadmap for policy makers to address inequalities, an indication that the post 2015 development agenda will establish a better connection between equality and inequality. The Goals will in many ways enable transformation, they have reconfigured and suggested how governments and international community need to plan, re-plan or preplan and implement actions to eradicate poverty and inequality by creating inclusive economic growth, preserve our planet and improve health of the global population.

In terms of decision making, at UN-Habitat, the highest decision making body is the Governing Council (GC) which meets biennially. Participation at the Governing council is structured and open to member states, Habitat Agenda partners, civil society organizations, private sector, research institutions, academia, foundations, women, youths, trade unions, local governments and United Nations Organizations. The GC meetings are divided into two segments; Plenary and High level segments. Each of the High Level segment is responsible for a specific theme. The GC sets the themes and communicates its instructions and decisions in respect to its activities through clear Resolutions. In carrying out the activities as outlined in the Resolutions, the UN secretarial consults and seeks guidance and directions from the various sub-committees. These sub-committees draws participants from Habitat Agenda partners and this is the level at which contributions and inputs of partners such as IFSW filters into the UN-Habitat system. The Habitat Agenda partners have a great influence to the main work of the UN as they consult and work very closely with the Committee of

Permanent Representatives (CPR) which is based in Nairobi and meets at least four times a year to monitor programs and the implementation of the UN activities.

How do we engage?

At the core of the dynamic and transformative nature of these goals, are people. Happy people, health people. The SDGs pursued conclusively and realistically, the end product is a people whose basic needs are met and have security to sustain their lives regardless of their income, social status or gender. The following are some thoughts and suggestions on how we can engage as a Federation in the various scenarios where the membership is involved.

Suggestions:

1. Look at the goals as currently formulated, interrogate their design, the wording and any possible shortcomings, we can have a combined report on this aspect.
2. Focus on one or a few goals depending on your area of competence or interest, track, how your country is implementing this particular goal, look if there are gaps, overwraps, shortcomings etc etc document all these for the combined report. Alternatively, wait until your country report is submitted(countries have to submit their reports to the central depository, each year for the next 15 years)then do the evaluation and document.
3. Wait for country report and evaluate, if the targets were met in a timely manner, if not met, you could evaluate the validity of the reasons given. This will inform a similar evaluation in the following year, a comparison of a few countries can be enriching professionally.
4. Look at the goals and the targets (or can select a few) in their current formulation, subject them to the **IFSW Ethical and Human Rights instruments**- to evaluate their

adherence. At least IFSW can prepare a report on this line for the central depository, this will help in the engagement, raise both the social work voice and visibility in this 15 years process. *This may be of importance to the Ethics and Human Rights Commissions.*

The outcomes of all these bits and pieces can be collated as one report at country (national association) level, regional level and possibly do a global report as a Federation at some point during the SDGs lifespan, which in effect will reflect the IFSW position in this process.

World Urban Forum

This is another key event in which IFSW has been involved since year 2002; the event takes place biennially, rotating in different locations around the world. The first one held in 2002 was in Nairobi, followed by other event held in Vancouver, Spain, China, Rio, Turkey, Colombia and the next one will be held in Malaysia on 4-9 January, 2018. The event is an informal gathering of governments, private sector, Habitat Agenda partners, civil society actors, UN organizations and host of several other stake holders. The platform provides an opportunity for creation of new networks and partnerships in pursuit of new strategies for integrating equity in the development agenda. Where possible, IFSW conducts a Network Event which is usually organized jointly with the local branch of the national association in the host country, at least this was the case in Canada, Spain, China and Kenya.

One key outcome of this event so far is the emergence of National World Urban Forums in various countries. These forums have the support of governments as synergy for responding to the needs of the growing urban population. As a result, civil society groups and development partners are now collaborating with governments in developing sound policies to guide the urbanization process.

World Cities Day

This is a day which is marked on the 31st October each year. The day has been designated for the purpose of promoting interest and sensitizing the international community in global urbanization and push forward cooperation in addressing challenges posed by rapid urbanization. IFSW jointly with the Kenyan Association has celebrated this event twice and plan to do the same in October. Perhaps for IFSW, this is an activity which we can celebrate in both Chile and Bangkok now that we have representation there.

World Habitat Day

The day is marked on the 1st Monday of October with the purpose of reflecting on the state of our cities and towns. Each year, the Day takes on a new theme chosen by UN, based on current issues related to the Habitat Agenda. The chosen themes often point to one of UN-HABITAT's focal areas such as inclusive housing and social services, safe and clean drinking water and sanitation, a safe health living environment for all with particular consideration for children, youth, women, elderly and disabled, affordable and sustainable transport and energy. It is possible to have a replica of this event in Chile and Bangkok as well.

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