

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT Goals

EDITORIAL

We all heard the saying, 'We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children', attributed to the late David Brower, prominent environmentalist. This proverb seems to try to inculcate in us the notion of environmental stewardship, which goes beyond window dressing attitudes. In keeping with this, in 2015 all UN member states including Malta adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which provides a shared blueprint for environmental governance. The underpinnings of the Agenda are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which recognize that ending poverty inherently complements strategies that improve health and education thereby decreasing inequality, spurring economic growth and spearheading environmental governance.

The ambitious SDGs are: **No Poverty; Zero Hunger; Good Health and Well-being; Quality Education; Gender Equality; Clean Water and Sanitation; Affordable and Clean Energy; Decent Work and Economic Growth; Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; Reduced Inequality; Sustainable Cities and Communities; Responsible Consumption and Production; Climate Action; Life Below Water; Life on Land; Peace and Justice Strong Institutions; and Partnerships to achieve the Goal.**

For the first time, we are seeing non-communicable diseases - such as cancer - being enshrined in a global development agenda and recognised to constitute a major health and development challenge, intrinsically impacting sustainable development. The SDGs try to stimulate member states to implement cost-effective interventions across the care continuum. They advocate vaccines, access to healthcare, good air quality, safe disposal of hazardous waste, and ways to tackle pollution, amongst other things.

At this stage I must refer to the article penned last March by Emmanuel Macron, French President, and published in no less than 22 languages and 28 newspapers across Europe. Macron's words stem from an earlier document, *Treaty establishing a Union for Climate and Biodiversity, providing for the establishment of a European Climate and Biodiversity Bank and a European Climate and Biodiversity Fund.*

Mr Macron's underlying message is about preserving 'European civilisation'. I quote ad verbatim, 'Getting back on track with progress also concerns spearheading the ecological cause. Will we be able to look our children in the eye if we do not also clear our climate debt? The European Union needs to set its target - zero carbon by 2050 and pesticides halved by 2025 - and adapt its policies accordingly with such measures as a European Climate Bank to finance the ecological transition, a European food safety force to improve our food controls and, to counter the lobby threat, independent scientific assessment of substances hazardous to the environment and health. This imperative needs to guide all our action: from the Central Bank to the European Commission, from the European budget to the Investment Plan for Europe, all our institutions need to have the climate as their mandate.'

We may well shrug off these words like water off a duck's back. However, several reports highlight that the problem is real and the price which we are paying is already high. Taking air quality as an example, which is often trivialized, the 2018 report published by the European Environment Agency, *Air quality in Europe* states that the Years of life lost (YLL) attributable to PM2.5 exposure in Malta is 629 [YLL/10<sup>5</sup> inhabitants], and the YLL attributable to ozone (O<sub>3</sub>) pollution is 41 [YLL/10<sup>5</sup> inhabitants] which is above the EU average. Need I add more? 🌱

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