

GRDA NOTE

Gozo and the Sustainable Development Goals

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Gozo and the Sustainable Development Goals

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Sustainable development has emerged as one of the key global issues of our time, amidst growing calls by private citizens and civil society to ensure that economic growth does not come at the expense of social and environmental wellbeing.

Malta has also embraced the concept of sustainability, given its wide-ranging implications for businesses and individuals alike. In fact, in 2012 the Maltese Government adopted the Sustainable Development Act, one of the first of its kind globally, with a focus on ensuring that sustainability issues are mainstreamed across public sector operations as well as society in general. Furthermore, in 2018 the Ministry for the Environment, Sustainable Development and Climate Change launched its Sustainable Development Vision for 2050, incorporating a number of wide-ranging objectives, proposals and targets for ensuring progress towards sustainable development within the Maltese Islands in the long-term.

Sustainability is also particularly important for Gozo, with its unique social and environmental assets playing a crucial role in fostering the island's prosperity, as well as forming the backbone of key economic sectors such as tourism.

A Brief look at the Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations (UN) has consistently advocated the importance of sustainable development, ever since the publication of the 1987 Brundtland Report, which set out a manifesto for growth that seeks to meet the needs of the present without compromising those of future generations. Since then, a number of initiatives have been launched by the UN in an attempt at setting the sustainability agenda globally while also creating common targets that are in line with the precepts of sustainable development.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the UN's latest and perhaps most ambitious effort to date. Launched in 2015, the SDGs comprise 17 individual global targets that must be achieved by 2030, and ratified by 193 countries that form part of the UN under the Agenda 2030 plan.

As seen in Chart 1, the SDGs span a wide variety of topics including the elimination of

poverty, climate action, gender equality, clean water and quality education amongst others, with each goal having approximately 8-12 quantifiable targets. In turn, the UN has also developed an index, appropriately-titled the SDG Index, which tracks each country's progress towards their sustainability targets across each goal using a number of metrics, with rankings and scores provided both regionally and globally.

As per the latest edition of the SDG Index for 2021, by the time of this publication Malta currently ranks 33rd out of 193 countries globally in terms of its progress towards achieving the SDG goals.

Chart 1 - The Sustainable Development Goals



(Source: UN, 2075)

Sustainability and the Regional Development of Gozo

Sustainability is not merely another buzzword; rather, it provides a blueprint for economic, social and environmental development where the quality of life of individuals is placed at the forefront. Malta has already made significant strides in its progress towards a sustainable future, with the 2021 SDG Index noting particular improvements in the eradication of poverty, education and clean energy.

Despite the obvious commonalities, Gozo possesses a distinct set of economic

realities, socio-cultural characteristics, inherent strengths and weaknesses which distinguish it from the rest of the main land. More specifically, the conditions and factors that underpin the sustainable development path for Gozo may differ substantially from those that prevail in its sister island. Therefore, in order to ensure that the precepts of sustainability prevail in Gozo, a targeted, focused approach is required that assesses progress in this regard as well as the specific actions that must be taken in order to steer the path towards sustainable development.

The SDGs could play a crucial role in this regard, since they provide an objective, internationally-adopted and accepted set of metrics with which to assess progress towards sustainable development, and which can be adapted and used specifically to measure Gozo's performance both across regions/countries, and over time. This systematic method of assessment, which is in line with an increasingly-regional and city-centric focus of various editions of the SDG Index in recent years, would assist in identifying Gozo's key priority areas of focus when it comes to sustainable development, and in turn the formulation of tailored policies and initiatives.

Concluding Remarks

The Gozo Regional Development Authority (GRDA) is well placed to monitor Gozo's progress towards the SDGs, given its stated remit of developing and streamlining regional policies that assist in the socio-economic development of Gozo.

Due to its important role in cultivating Gozo's prosperity over the coming years, including the development and implementation of the Regional Development Strategy, the GRDA will ensure that sustainability is at the core of Gozo's short, medium and long-term goals.

Furthermore, the use of SDGs will also add credibility to the work carried out by the Authority, since policies and actions undertaken would be linked to specific indicators and targets in order to assess likely impacts. Indeed, sustainability is already a key part of the GRDA's vision and governing values, and the formal integration of the SDGs within the GRDA's policies, projects and overall strategy would further contribute in this regard, while also providing a set of data-driven metrics with which to guide the GRDA in executing its vision.



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