

Council conclusions on a transformative post-2015 agenda

General Affairs Council meeting Brussels, 16 December 2014

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. In the post-2015 agenda we have a great opportunity to address some of the key global issues facing the world today in a truly transformative manner. As the Council has emphasised in previous conclusions¹, foremost among these issues are the interrelated challenges of eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development in all its three dimensions (environmental, social and economic). To address these challenges in a coordinated and coherent manner, we need an ambitious agenda, which leaves no-one behind. It should be truly global and universal, with all countries and stakeholders playing their full part. These Council conclusions consider the progress so far and the opportunities ahead, as we enter the next stage of the international process.
2. Achieving a transformative agenda is a key priority and the EU and its Member States stand ready to engage in an open and constructive dialogue with all partners and stakeholders to this end.
3. The EU and its Member States remain strongly committed to the Millennium Declaration, to accelerating efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to ensuring that the post-2015 agenda provides a comprehensive follow-up to Rio+20 and addresses the structural causes of poverty, inequality, climate change, and environmental degradation.
4. The EU welcomes the range of inputs into the international process, including the many contributions from stakeholders and the global thematic consultations organised by the United Nations, that have helped engage an unprecedented number of people across the world. Further to the Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the outcome document of the MDGs Special Event, the Council welcomes the Report of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing (ICESDF) and the proposal from the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which shall be the main basis for integrating sustainable development goals into the post-2015 development agenda, while recognizing that other inputs will also be considered, as set out in UN General Assembly resolution 68/309.

¹ Council conclusions of 25 June 2013 on The Overarching Post 2015 Agenda (doc. 11559/13) and Council conclusions of 12 December 2013 on Financing poverty eradication and sustainable development beyond 2015 (doc. 17553/13). EU priorities for the 69th session of the UNGA (doc. 10856/14).

5. The Council welcomes the presentation by the UN Secretary General on 4 December 2014 of his Synthesis Report on the Post-2015 Agenda "The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet". The report, by bringing together various elements needed for a successful agenda, provides a key contribution for the upcoming intergovernmental processes in the run-up to the September 2015 Summit.
6. We welcome the opportunity the Third International Financing for Development Conference in July 2015 provides to address both enabling policy frameworks and the mobilisation and effective use of financial resources for the achievement of the post-2015 agenda.
7. We emphasise the importance of the ongoing negotiations to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and of reaching an ambitious legally binding agreement applicable to all Parties in Paris in December 2015.
8. We note the importance of the upcoming negotiations for a Post-2015 framework for Disaster Risk Reduction at the Sendai Conference in March 2015.
9. The previous Council Conclusions and the Commission Communication "A Decent Life for All: From Vision to Collective Action" ² are important contributions to further developing the position of the EU and its Member States in the run-up to the summit in September 2015.

Guiding principles

10. The Council reaffirms the vision and priorities of the EU and its Member States as set out in its Conclusions of June 2013 and emphasises that poverty eradication and sustainable development are mutually reinforcing and intrinsically linked. The post-2015 agenda should therefore integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced way across the agenda; ensure coherence and synergies; and address inter-linkages throughout the goals and targets. It is also crucial to ensure that the agenda has a rights-based approach encompassing all human rights and that it respects, supports, and builds on existing multilateral agreements, conventions, commitments, and processes.
11. The universality of the agenda is fundamental. The agenda should be global in coverage and universally applicable, while taking into account levels of development, national contexts and capacities and respecting national policies and priorities. It should overcome traditional divides and recognise that all countries have common challenges and opportunities and a shared future.
12. The post-2015 agenda must reflect the complexity of sustainable development and poverty eradication. At the same time a clear and concise framework is also essential for ownership and effective implementation by all governments and all relevant stakeholders. A framework that can easily be communicated and understood is crucial to success and to ensuring public support for the agenda.
13. The post-2015 agenda should be guided by the principle of accountability, the fundamental requirements of which are ownership of the whole agenda by all countries, transparency and effective and efficient monitoring and review of progress. It should also significantly increase people's ability to effectively and meaningfully participate in and contribute to the policy choices affecting them and to hold governments and other actors accountable for progress.

² Doc. 10412/14 + ADD 1 - COM(2014) 335 final.

14. Business as usual is no longer an option, whether in terms of human dignity, equality or sustainability. The new agenda should aim to eradicate poverty in all its forms and to achieve sustainable development in its three dimensions in a balanced and integrated manner. It must steel our determination to end extreme poverty in one generation, building on and completing the unfinished business of the MDGs. We note with concern that conflict-affected and fragile states are still lagging behind. The agenda must also recognise that environmental sustainability is fundamental to ensuring the sustainable prosperity and well-being of all people within planetary boundaries. It must unlock the drivers of the green economy, make our economies and lifestyles more equitable and sustainable and more effective in reducing poverty. The new agenda must be people-centred, based on human rights, and combat discrimination, including gender inequality and gender based violence. It should address the structural causes of poverty, inequality and violence including by strengthening effective inclusive and democratic institutions, good governance and rule of law. Only by addressing all these elements will the new agenda be transformative.

Achieving a transformative agenda

15. The agenda should address the challenges and opportunities as set out in the OWG proposal, i.e.: poverty; hunger, food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture; health and well-being; education; gender equality and women's empowerment; water and sanitation; energy; inclusive and sustainable growth, employment and decent work; infrastructure, sustainable industrialisation and innovation; inequality; cities and human settlements; sustainable consumption and production patterns; climate change; oceans, seas and marine resources; terrestrial ecosystems, forests, desertification, land degradation and biodiversity; peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice and accountable institutions; means of implementation and the global partnership for sustainable development.
16. The UN Secretary-General's synthesis report presents a vision for carrying forward a universal transformative agenda for the next 15 years and beyond, underpinned by human rights and aimed to end poverty, transform lives, and protect the planet. We welcome the innovative approach to use an integrated set of six essential elements to facilitate discussions in order to frame a sustainable development agenda; an approach focused around: ending poverty and fighting inequality; ensuring healthy lives, knowledge, and the inclusion of women and children; growing a strong, inclusive, and transformative economy; protecting our ecosystems for all societies and our children; promoting safe and peaceful societies, and strong institutions; and catalysing global solidarity for sustainable development.
17. The agenda should tackle cross-cutting issues which should be mainstreamed throughout, including disaster risk reduction and resilience. In addition, well-managed migration and human mobility should be fully recognised in the agenda as potential development enablers, acknowledging the need to address also the opportunities and challenges of migration. We acknowledge the natural and cultural diversity of the world, and recognise that culture, including world cultural heritage and creative industries, can have an important role in achieving inclusive and sustainable development.
18. We stress the importance of maintaining in the agenda the integrated approach of the OWG proposal for SDGs, which bring together the many interrelated challenges and opportunities. We highlight the need to maintain and strengthen synergies, coherence and inter-linkages across the whole agenda.

19. The agenda should leave no one behind. In particular, it must address, without any discrimination, the needs of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, including children, the elderly and persons with disabilities, as well as of marginalised groups and indigenous peoples; and it must respond to the aspirations of young people. We should ensure that no person – wherever they live and regardless of ethnicity, gender, age, disability, religion or belief, race, or other status is denied universal human rights and basic economic opportunities. We emphasise the critical importance of quality education, universal health coverage, and social protection for all, which are central for the achievement of sustainable development. We further reiterate the need to eliminate malnutrition in all its forms.
20. We reiterate that the empowerment and human rights of women and girls, and ending both discrimination in all its forms and violence against women and girls, must be at the core of the post-2015 agenda. Goals, targets and indicators across the framework should address legal, social and economic barriers to gender equality. We recognise the importance of involving men and boys in advancing gender equality. We remain committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of their review conferences and in this context sexual and reproductive health and rights.
21. We highlight the opportunities for building an inclusive green economy. The agenda must lead to a transition towards sustainable consumption and production patterns which also fosters resource efficiency and prevents and minimises pollution, including through sustainable management of chemicals and waste.
22. We highlight the need to prominently address peaceful and inclusive societies, democratic governance and the rule of law. Progressing these issues successfully is a key part of making the post-2015 agenda transformative. Human rights and fundamental freedoms must be respected, protected and fulfilled, including freedom of expression, association and the media. Strengthening civil society and ensuring an enabling environment for civil society actors is essential. We need to ensure that institutions, including security and justice institutions, are legitimate, accountable, and efficient and act in accordance with the rule of law. We need to effectively address the drivers of violence and conflict in all societies and to tackle issues that hamper good governance such as corruption and exclusion.
23. We reiterate that the post-2015 agenda must be fully coherent and supportive of climate objectives, and these should be visible within and across the agenda. This should support the UNFCCC without opening up parallel climate negotiations.
24. We recognise that biodiversity is a critical foundation of the earth's life support system on which our present and future welfare depends as emphasised by the Convention on Biological Diversity. We support the integration and mainstreaming of biodiversity in the post-2015 agenda. Meeting the Aichi Biodiversity Targets will contribute significantly to broader global sustainable development priorities.
25. The EU and its Member States welcome the OWG proposal. An important area for further work will be to ensure well-defined indicators, allowing for implementation and monitoring of a final set of targets that are specific, measurable, and achievable, preserving the important political balance that the OWG proposal represents. Targets should have a transformative impact, avoid duplication and be consistent with UN standards and agreements, and with international legal frameworks. In particular, we emphasise full compliance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which provides the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out.

A new global partnership

26. The strongly interlinked challenges of poverty eradication and sustainable development are both common – since they are of universal concern and relevance to all people – and global, since in an interdependent world many challenges call for collective action and global solutions. The implementation of the post-2015 agenda requires a global partnership for sustainable development based on the guiding principles of universality, shared responsibility, mutual accountability, consideration of respective capabilities, and the adoption of a multi-stakeholder approach. We need to develop a stronger, more accountable and inclusive global partnership to mobilise action by all countries and stakeholders at all levels. It is essential to have a more comprehensive, coherent and effective approach, enabling the implementation of the agenda through various means while addressing the special needs of the least developed countries and people most in need.
27. We have a unique opportunity to make a difference together, with a new global partnership that is based on multi-stakeholder cooperation, which provides a high level of exchange and collaboration can achieve higher levels of ambition and innovation. The global partnership needs to promote and learn from the experience of existing partnerships, such as the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation and 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production. The private sector and civil society will have a key role to play in the implementation of the agenda and we recall the importance of the principles set out in the Global Compact and UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
28. The EU and its Member States recognise that universality will require commitment from all. In this context, the post-2015 agenda should be reflected in the internal and external policies of the Member States and of the EU, including the renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy³, and the Europe 2020 strategy and related policies. The EU and its Member States commit to playing their full part in all aspects of the agenda including means of implementation, and will also expect other partners - including new and emerging actors - to contribute their fair share. We need to frame appropriate and ambitious commitments for all, taking account of levels of development, national contexts and capacities. National ownership and accountability will be of key importance for the post-2015 agenda and its implementation, including through sustainable development strategies or commitments at the appropriate levels.
29. We must ensure a policy environment conducive to the success of the framework. All countries should promote policy coherence for sustainable development at all levels and review and assess their policies, as appropriate, in order to support the successful implementation of the framework. We note in particular the importance of sound policies in areas including trade, science, migration, technology and innovation, knowledge and expertise sharing. The EU and its Member States also remain fully committed to ensuring Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) as a key contribution to the collective effort towards broader policy coherence for sustainable development.
30. We recall previous Council Conclusions on the Annual Report 2014 to the European Council on EU Development Aid Targets⁴, including that development cooperation remains a key priority for the EU, which has formally undertaken to collectively commit 0.7% of GNI to official development assistance by 2015, thus making a decisive step towards achieving the MDGs, and by which the EU and its Member States reaffirmed all their individual and collective Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitments, taking into account the exceptional budgetary circumstances.

³ Doc. 10117/06

⁴ Council conclusions of 19 May 2014 on the Annual Report 2014 to the European Council on EU Development Aid Targets (doc. 9989/14).

31. In a changing global context, the financial resources required for poverty eradication and sustainable development remain significant and will have to be addressed in a holistic, coherent and comprehensive manner. We welcome that the ICESDF report highlights the importance of a comprehensive approach to sustainable development financing including mobilisation and effective use of domestic resources, international public finance, private finance and innovative financing from domestic and international sources as well as the fight against illicit financial flows. We note the need for the gradual elimination of environmentally harmful subsidies that are incompatible with sustainable development, including for fossil fuels. We recall previous Council conclusions on Financing poverty eradication and sustainable development beyond 2015, and we recognise that ODA remains an important and catalytic element in the overall financing available for developing countries, in particular to those most in need.⁵
32. The EU and its Member States consider that preparations for the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in July 2015 and the Post-2015 Summit in September should reinforce each other. The Financing for Development Conference should address the range of means of implementation for the post-2015 agenda, including both enabling policy frameworks and mobilisation and effective use of financial resources thereby making a positive contribution to the Post-2015 Summit. The outcome of these and related processes should result in one single agenda.
33. A solid, efficient and effective approach to the review, monitoring and accountability of the post-2015 agenda at national, regional and global level will be crucial in order to assess progress towards the achievement of goals and targets. It should be based on effective multilateralism, openness, meaningful participation, transparency and mutual accountability, including an element of peer review. It should benefit from the necessary support from an efficient and effective UN system as well as from other relevant institutions, and involve all partners and stakeholders including civil society, the scientific community, media and the private sector. An effective monitoring and accountability framework should be developed within the upcoming intergovernmental processes, including a key oversight role for the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) in the follow-up and review of progress of the post-2015 agenda at global level. Existing mechanisms and processes should be used in a coordinated manner wherever possible to avoid duplication and limit administrative burden. The EU remains committed to transparency and accountability, and in this context, the Council welcomes the 2014 EU Accountability Report on Financing for Development.
34. Robust and measurable indicators, with a focus on results, will be essential for reporting and should if not yet available be developed taking account of experience, best practice and expert knowledge as well as citizen voices for accountability. It will be crucial to strengthen the use of existing data and ensure that higher quality data is collected in a coordinated manner, and to capitalise on new information technologies. In this regard the Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress and the Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for sustainable development have made a useful contribution. As emphasised in the OWG proposal, disaggregation of data by income, gender, age, and other factors will be essential to ensure that targets are met by all relevant groups and that no one is left behind. We must recognise the need to look beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to broader measures of progress, including social, human and natural capital, to address a more comprehensive idea of sustainable livelihoods and well-being. We recognise the importance of developing statistical capacities, especially in developing countries, to enable effective accountability. We also note that Eurostat and Member State statistical offices will have a significant role to play in supporting the evolving process of sustainable development monitoring.

⁵ Council conclusions of 12 December 2013 on Financing poverty eradication and sustainable development beyond 2015 (doc. 17553/13).

35. The most essential element for a truly transformative post-2015 agenda is its effective implementation which mostly takes place at the country level. National ownership and leadership will be of key importance. National efforts need to be reinforced by cooperation and partnership on regional and global levels, including multi-stakeholder cooperation and partnerships. Ongoing work to make the UN development system more "fit for purpose" at headquarters as well as at country level is important for achieving the agenda. The EU and its Member States recognise that advancing sustainable development also depends on our own domestic action and on developing our own set of implementation measures.
36. The Council invites the Commission to propose a concrete way forward on the global partnership, including the various elements addressed above, based on continued consultative work including with Member States.

Next steps

37. The EU and its Member States will continue to play an active and constructive role in all ongoing processes and support their convergence in order to achieve a single overarching post-2015 agenda. For this purpose, the EU and its Member States will continue to develop and update common positions in order to effectively engage in a unified manner in the upcoming intergovernmental negotiations.
 38. The EU and its Member States will continue to work constructively and inclusively with all partners and with stakeholders, including civil society, parliaments, scientific and academic institutions, local authorities, the private sector, philanthropic and social partners throughout the preparation of the post-2015 agenda as well as during its implementation.
 39. The EU and its Member States will continue to engage in regular dialogue and outreach on these issues. In particular, we will build on joint initiatives and declarations and continue to work with regional partners. The EU and its Member States are committed to playing an active role in building the necessary consensus to establish and implement an ambitious, transformative and inclusive post-2015 agenda."
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