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THE POST-2015 AGENDA – REFORM OR TRANSFORMATION?

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The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the beginning of the millennium outlined a joint realignment of a global reference framework for international development cooperation, which may be interpreted as a new approach to revive the initiatives of modernisation along Western lines driven since the 1960s but with only moderate success. The most significant difference to the old ideas was especially the clear, straightforward and communicable focus on eight priority goals, which were supposed to be implemented by a specific date – namely 2015 – by partner countries in the south with the support of industrialised countries. Based on the World Bank's Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) (Wolfensohn 1999) the responsibility for implementing the MDGs in this approach lies with the governments of developing countries, whereas the old donor countries focus on providing development financing, debt relief and integrating developing countries in the world market and are responsible for the systemic issues (the coherence and consistency of the international monetary, financial and trading system to promote global development). There is no dispute that this paradigm shift in many developing countries has made a significant contribution to an acceptance of responsibility by the government and the development of institutions and capacity. Also with regard to the paramount goal of poverty reduction, many countries have achieved successes, especially in Asia.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon writes in his foreword to the 2013 MDG Report (United Nations 2013a) about the results of aiming to build a global partnership. "The picture is mixed. We can do better. The best way to prepare for the post-2015 era is to demonstrate that when the international community commits to a global partnership for development, it means it and directs its resources to where they are most needed" (United Nations 2013a: iii). If the old donor countries' contribution to achieving the MDGs is considered, both the big push in development financing (Sachs 2005) as well as the contribution to the systemic issues at global governance level have fallen far short of expectations. Due to geopolitical and economic power shifts from Europe especially to Asia and Latin America, several countries that are clas-

sified as the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) have even appeared as players in development cooperation, in order to secure either raw materials or markets for themselves. In particular the competition for commodities and energy between the new emerging donors and the old donors and similarly the distinct separation of the BRICS from the development strategies of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) as well as China's economic cooperation with African states have resulted in the old donors wanting to see the social focus of the MDG approach supplemented at least with economic goals. Against the background of the debate about the effectiveness of development cooperation (OECD 2005) it is easy to argue that development strategies are always more effective when all the stakeholders are pursuing the same goals. The effective implementation of the entire new development architecture has thus been made greatly dependent on whether it succeeds in bringing new stakeholders to the negotiating table (see Busan 2011).

Following the financial and economic crisis in 2008 it was obvious that many DAC donors were unable to meet their commitments to development financing to implement the MDGs¹. At the UN summit to discuss the MDGs in New York in 2010 the MDGs were reaffirmed yet again and the international community was called on to undertake every effort to achieve the MDGs. In September 2011 the UN Secretary General appointed a **task team** to prepare a post-2015 development agenda involving all stakeholders. In June 2012 the Secretary General was presented with the report *Realising The Future We Want For All* (UN System Task Team 2012), in which it is stated, "The central challenge of the post-2015 UN development agenda is to ensure that globalisation becomes a positive force for all the world's peoples of present and future generations. Globalisation offers great opportunities, but its benefits are at present very unevenly shared." The challenges for the agenda were described as follows. "The immediate challenge is to reach consensus on the contours of an agenda that adequately identifies the development needs of present and future generations, and is capable of crystallising these priorities in clear, easy-to-communicate sustainable development goals that will help guide

coherent policy action at the global, regional and national levels.”²

In July 2012 the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon announced a **high-level panel of eminent persons on the post-2015 development agenda**, which under the chairmanship of Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and British Prime Minister David Cameron was to produce a report by May 2013³ (United Nations 2013b). The report’s conclusion was that the post-2015 agenda must be supported by five major transformative changes: “i) leave no one behind, ii) put sustainable development at the core, iii) transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth, iv) build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all, v) forge a new global partnership.” Furthermore the eminent persons argue in favour of a data revolution, which is based on the use of new information technologies.

It became clear no later than following the UN summit in Rio de Janeiro in 2012 (Rio+20) on the subject of sustainable development that neither the BRICS nor the G7 countries were prepared to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases in support of global climate protection. The developing countries especially also argued for their right to development, which would only be achievable for them through economic growth and energy extracted from cheaper fossil fuels. The effective failure of the Rio+20 environmental summit therefore sharpened the global development agenda’s focus even more on issues of economic growth on the one hand but postponed joint global approaches to resolving the associated issues of sustainability, climate and environmental protection on the other. In the final communiqué it is true that some general commitments were expressed in favour of sustainable industries, the green economy, poverty reduction, the fight against hunger, soil erosion and against climate change plus the development of sustainable development goals (SDGs) was resolved⁴. Thus a bridge to the MDGs was established, which set the course of the debate about a subsequent reference framework after 2015.

Since the Rio+20 summit therefore a complex global preparatory process has been occurring at UN level, in which the unfinished agenda of sustainable economic activity is merged together in a post-2015 agenda with a redefinition of the MDGs. However, the instruction was given that the SDGs to be developed should not exceed a manageable number; they should be ambitious but easy

to communicate. In January 2013 the UN General Assembly therefore established an **open working group on sustainable development goals** (OWG) comprising 30 individuals. Their purpose was to develop a proposal for goals that are numerically limited, ambitious but easy to communicate, which are also coherent and integrated in the UN development agenda beyond 2015⁵. In May 2014 the OWG presented a revised report, which contains 16 key aspects.

1. Poverty eradication, building shared prosperity and promoting equality
2. Sustainable agriculture, food security and nutrition
3. Health and population dynamics
4. Education and lifelong learning
5. Gender equality and women’s empowerment
6. Water and sanitation
7. Energy
8. Economic growth, employment and infrastructure
9. Industrialisation and promoting equality among nations
10. Sustainable cities and human settlements
11. Sustainable consumption and production
12. Climate change
13. Conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, oceans and seas
14. Ecosystems and biodiversity
15. Means of implementation/global partnership for sustainable development
16. Peaceful and inclusive societies, rule of law and capable institutions

By September 2014 the OWG is to submit its report with a maximum 15 objectives to the UN General Assembly, which will then provide a summary report. This list documents clearly the breadth of the agenda, for which the individual working groups are to develop proposals.

An **intergovernmental committee of experts on sustainable development financing**, which was established in June 2013, has the task of assessing the specific need for financial resources and drafting a financing strategy in consultation with all the stakeholders. At present it has not yet determined when the issue of financing will be included in the overall discussion. One major argument for addressing the financing issue and possible burden sharing in the discussion before the spring of 2015 is that it

is important to know how the costs should be shared before ambitious goals are formulated, the implementation of which would fail in terms of financing from the outset. The establishment of the **high-level political forum on sustainable development** is the result of the Rio+20 resolution to set up a forum that is equipped with the appropriate leadership to be capable of pushing ahead with expanding the integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions in the sustainable development sector. The high-level political forum will take the place of the Commission on Sustainable Development initiated in 1992. In 2014 the meeting will be chaired by the ECOSOC presidency, which is currently held by Austria.

At a sectoral level different procedures by various UN agencies are also in place, which in their view are intended to ensure their sector is considered in the new frame of reference. For example, the third world conferences on Education for All (EFA) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) are scheduled in early 2015.

In addition to the UN level there is of course also a coordination process within the EU⁶, which is supposed to result in the EU having an effective and coherent presence at the UN General Conference. Commissioner Piebalgs is a member of the high-level panel of eminent persons on the post-2015 agenda, for example. In early 2013 the EU Commission sent a memorandum to the Parliament and Council⁷ with a statement that started a broadly based discussion process. In addition to the Council's conclusions⁸ the EU Commission's deliberations on development financing beyond 2015 were also included, which are based especially on stronger private sector involvement.⁹

The attempt to illustrate in broad strokes the complexity of the process occurring at UN level since 2010, in which several different important institutions and committees were represented, shows that new mechanisms are being tried out at UN level, which go beyond the normal repertoire of UN procedures. Linking the findings of open working groups with those of a high level panel of eminent persons and the inclusion of a high level political forum produces innovation and energy on the one hand but also complexity on the other, which may be used politically and formally to block processes and focus attention on one's own interests. Until now it has been very difficult to assess the progress of these processes, as on the one hand the UN General Assembly may be established in September 2015 as the main hub, in which all the processes are

supposed to converge, but the inclusion of major issues such as the financing of projects is still largely unresolved. In addition, the official negotiations begin at government level only in the autumn of 2014, so that only the mere outlines of positions have been tabled at present. Therefore, the processes at UN level are also described as a "confusing tangle of consultations and negotiations – with an uncertain outcome" (Martens 2013).

Considering that at the same time the DAC donor countries seek to modernise the concept of ODA (official development assistance) by 2015 and therefore new objectives for financing sustainable development goals will be required at UN level, in which the rather vague financing commitments from the climate and environment sector have to be pinned down along with the public financing commitments from the development sector that have only been achieved to some extent, the fear is that until the expiry of the MDGs no viable or binding consensus can be achieved on a clear definition or specific sharing of burdens.

The principle familiar in international environmental and climate negotiations (UNCED) of common but differentiated responsibilities (Martens 2014) that states are allocated joint responsibility for protecting the environment but which allows for different measures in line with the state's social, economic, historic and ecological conditions in assuming this responsibility, is also relevant if the SDG approach is expanded in the area of development. The specific manifestations of asymmetric rights and obligations between partner countries would have to be discussed and negotiated afresh, especially once the donor countries have delegated responsibility for development to the partner countries' governments within the new development architecture and only ever live up to their moral responsibility in the event of disaster. This principle, which became a political sticking point at the Rio+20 summit between the BRICS and the industrialised countries, will in the post-2015 agenda also constitute a main point of difference between the industrialised and developing countries.

Another sticking point is the claim emerging from the sustainability debate that the SDGs are supposed to be applicable to all countries – i.e. both for partner as well as industrialised countries. This gives rise to political, economic and environmental codes of conduct for all, which ultimately would have to be reconciled first with other political and economic concepts (such as globalisation, market liberalisation).

Consider also that in most countries the responsibilities for the environment, climate and sustainability are located in other ministries than responsibilities for development policy and that environmental issues continue to be defined primarily as a national challenge, whereas development policy is subordinated to foreign policy or foreign economic policy, then policymakers have so far lacked the appropriate tools to bridge this fragmentation and construct a coherent policy. The idea of bringing together the responsibilities for international agendas and challenges in a separate ministry for global development (Faust/Messner 2012; Obrovsky/Raza 2012) has not been pursued further by politicians.

Therefore, the main challenge for governments is to “bring together the post-MDG and SDG discussions in a single negotiation process and integrate the results of various parallel negotiations, especially in the climate sector, in order to reach a comprehensive and consistent post-2015 agenda” (Martens 2013).

Both the experiences of climate and development summit meetings of the last 20 years as well as the new geopolitical distribution of power, in which the BRICs play a central role, indicate that no binding and viable consensus can be reached by September 2015. For the United Nations this negotiation process is therefore also a major organisational and political challenge, and because of the complexity of the negotiation framework especially, the prospects of success are not rated as especially high, although there is also a certain pressure on the United Nations to succeed.

In the discussion during the preparatory stage of the post-2015 agenda roughly three different approaches are identified, which may also include individual components of the other approaches.

The **diplomatic, pragmatic** approach. Based on the MDGs and SDGs a catalogue of universal sustainability goals will be created, which will be made operational and is supposed to be valid for all countries. This is mainly to provide a comprehensive extension of and addition to a catalogue of global goals and priorities, which are global challenges that have to be solved by the international community of states. What is required here especially is a consideration of the various sectors, stakeholders and issues in the negotiation process. This approach is primarily aimed at the formulation and resolution of a comprehensive reference document, in which the actual implemen-

tation of the agreement is not yet up for discussion. This is where on the one hand the question is raised of the added value of a comprehensive new SDG catalogue in comparison with the many resolutions of recent UN summit meetings.

The **global governance approach** is based on an institutional and organisational, process-oriented perspective and discusses and criticises the tools and processes at global governance level – mainly at UN level. This is especially where changes to and reforms of global governance are addressed, in order to achieve binding procedures and a shared global agenda. This approach focuses on the policy negotiation and settlement process between states, governments and institutions and considers how and in which context a better global negotiated result could be achieved.

The third approach is a **visionary transformation approach**, which seeks the causes of failed development and a lack of environmental and economic sustainability and demands changes at this level. Instead of normative lists of goals and reforms in the organisation of international relationships a fundamental transformation of the political and economic framework is required as concepts of growth and modernisation cannot be reconciled either with ecological and economic sustainability or with the community’s democratic legitimacy.

With our selection of authors in this publication, who have very different attitudes and perspectives on this issue, we have tried to offer various brief contributions, which think beyond the diplomatic and pragmatic approach and in addition to possible reforms they also address the need for the transformation of social, political and economic conditions.

In the following article **Richard Manning** analyses the weaknesses of the MDG concept and stresses the importance of an appropriate policy environment to support a new approach based on sustainability and fairness. As funding is also needed especially to implement it, he also devotes his attention in his article to the future of international development cooperation and the role that Austria could take on here.

Inge Kaul in her article misses a certain sense of realism in the process of preparing for the post-2015 agenda, as beyond the process of goal setting she calls for procedures that will also commit the international community to

joint action. She therefore wants an in-depth discussion on the one hand and a summit meeting on the subject of financing for development entitled Monterrey Plus and the establishment of a council for global responsibility on the other.

Liane Schalatek in her article appeals for financial support and the consideration of gender equality and sees sustainability as only achievable if sectors such as the care economy and the green economy are linked and the dominant economic paradigm is fundamentally changed.

Magdalena M. Holztrattner focuses on the human being as an individual in a new global reference framework and outlines boundaries and points of contact for the post-2015 agenda, which are derived from Catholic social teaching and the writings of Pope Francis.

Olivier Consolo takes a self-critical view of the role of civil society in shaping political processes and with regard to a new post-2015 agenda and calls for a new decade, in which preparations can be made for a social transformation.

Ulrich Brand argues for a fundamental socio-ecological transformation as a basic condition of a realistic post-2015 agenda and warns of global management illusions. He also sees in the post-2015 agenda an opportunity that terms such as development and growth are changed and development policy overall can be restaged on the basis of socio-ecological transformation.

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1 see: <http://www.un.org/en/mdg/summit2010/>

2 see: http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/614Post_2015_UNTTreport.pdf

3 see: <http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf>

4 see: <http://www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/727The%20Future%20We%20Want%2019%20June%201230pm.pdf>

5 see: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg.html>

6 see: http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/millennium-development-goals/post-2015_en.htm

7 see: http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/documents/2013-02-22_communication_a_decent_life_for_all_post_2015_en.pdf

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