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PROSPECTS FOR GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY

Requirements for the Post-2015 Agenda: Greater Political Participation, Equality and Sustainability

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The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are due to expire in 2015. They have formed the international agenda for improving people's living conditions for fifteen years. Several of the targets linked to the eight goals, such as halving extreme poverty and halving the proportion of people who do not have access to safe drinking water, have already been achieved. There has been little progress in other areas, such as the fight against hunger and secure jobs. While the old goals have been helpful, they are too technical. They do not cover important issues such as political participation, the rule of law and good governance. Ecologically compatible growth and lack of equality are also not given sufficient attention. The goals are not comprehensive enough and no longer match the current challenges posed by global developments structurally, which is why they need to be reformed in Germany's interest.

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1. CURRENT SITUATION

The post-2015 agenda will set the course for international cooperation to overcome poverty and protect the climate and the environment over the next fifteen years. The most detailed proposals for new goals originate from the High Level Panel convened by Ban Ki-moon. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) formulated for the first time at the 2012 climate summit in Rio de Janeiro are also intended to inform the post-2015 agenda. There is currently an Open Working Group consisting of representatives from the Member States meeting at regular intervals at the UN, which is due to present concrete proposals in mid-2014. These proposals will represent the basis on which the UN Member States will subsequently agree new goals. This will entail a tough negotiation process. The goals are in danger of being watered down, because the short-term interests of some states driven by a desire for power and by economic ambitions could inhibit their willingness to take courageous measures, particularly in the areas of greater political participation, stronger climate protection and the fight against inequality. In its own interest, Germany should therefore promote these causes more forcefully, also in its role within the European Union. A document approved by the German government in February 2014, "Post-2015 Agenda for Sustainable Development – Key Positions of the German Government", which includes proposals on 13 goals, covers these particular areas and therefore offers a good basis to promote these goals in the intergovernmental negotiations starting in early 2015 from a position of credibility.¹

1.1. Strengths of the MDGs

The MDGs have created global benchmarks in some central areas. The Millennium Declaration, on which they were based, was adopted by 189 UN Member States in 2000. Never before had there been a greater global consensus about goals and means to fight poverty.

The goals are also easy to understand and communicate, and the targets are quantifiable. Many developing and newly industrialised countries drafted their own national development plans based on the MDGs. This helps to exert pressure on governments because any backsliding is easy to detect through established review mechanisms, and awareness of them can mobilise large parts of the public.

1.2. Weaknesses of the MDGs

The MDGs have always been perceived as a top-down agenda and as an "OECD product", as developing countries and civil society were not involved adequately in their drafting.

For some governments, this has occasionally served as a welcome excuse for their refusal to submit to a "Western" agenda and for their failure to make development efforts in certain areas as called for in the MDGs.

Furthermore, the MDGs were largely aimed at developing and newly industrialised countries. They were more to do with the transfer of funds from North to South than the joint fight against global problems. It will no longer be possible to negotiate a post-2015 agenda with the Group of 77 in this one-sided form. They will also demand targets for the OECD states with concrete, stronger commitments concerning environmental and climate protection, production and consumption patterns as well as a fair trading system. The eighth MGD "Global Partnership for Development" was very nonspecific. However, climate change, financial and food crises, access to water as well as cross-border conflicts or infectious diseases illustrate the need for better protection of global collective goods. Only if the joint responsibility of all states is reflected manifestly in the new catalogue it will have a chance to assume political clout. This can only succeed with global, universally valid goals and targets that must be adjusted to individual countries and their starting situation.

The greatest weakness of the MDGs is that they are too technical. Although the Millennium Declaration explicitly advocates democracy, the rule of law, good governance and freedom of the press, none of these were included in the MDGs. This was due to the unwillingness of some countries to make commitments in these areas, which were politically sensitive for them. However, if there are no global goals on political participation and the rule of law, the chances of creating an important monitoring tool to oversee governments and strengthen the ability of a country's population to take responsibility for itself are lost. Funds (including funds from development cooperation) are frequently not invested in sectors where they are needed most. In all countries, abuses of power and mismanagement can be countered most efficiently through greater transparency as well as opportunities for the population to exert influence and make choices. For this reason, the credibility of a new agenda will hinge on the goals relating to good governance, political participation and the rule of law. Generally, autocracies are worse than democracies at combating poverty, implementing welfare state measures and fighting discrimination.² Besides, political participation and civil liberties in particular do not only serve as means to improve the functioning of a state. They are essential for people to live in dignity and to allow individuals to realise their potential, and there is no alternative to them.



2. MDG OUTCOMES AND REFORM REQUIREMENTS FOR THE POST-2015 AGENDA

When you examine the crude figures, the outcomes achieved one year before the MDGs are due to expire present a mixed picture. Looking to the future, the success of a new agenda will depend above all on the fulfilment and further development of the following three goals: comprehensive poverty reduction, education and environment.

2.1. Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger (Goal 1)

The greatest success of the MDGs has been the achievement of the target to halve extreme poverty. The proportion of people who subsist on less than 1.25 dollars a day shrank from 47 to 22 per cent between 1990 and 2010, their number dropping from two to under 1.4 billion.³ While growth promoted by capitalism and free trade accounts for two thirds of poverty reduction within a country, reduced inequality contributes the remaining third. In the countries with the greatest inequality, one per cent extra income only results in a 0.6 per cent reduction in poverty. In the countries with the lowest level of inequality, on the other hand, it reduces poverty by 4.3 per cent.⁴ Whether extreme poverty can be eradicated by 2030 is therefore above all a question of distribution. While poverty has gone down throughout the world, inequality has gone up. Two thirds of people currently still existing below the poverty line live in emerging economies, which have made enormous economic progress. The way these countries deal with inequality will be an important factor in determining the speed of the global fight against poverty in the short and medium term.⁵ Irrespective of this, the following applies to almost all developing and newly industrialised countries: whatever area they have made developmental progress in during the course of the last fifteen years, rural areas almost always lag behind the cities, girls and women behind boys and men (over two thirds of people in extreme poverty around the world are women and girls) and ethnic minorities behind majorities.

It is the fragile states that are lagging furthest behind with respect to the MDGs. Out of some thirty countries that are likely to miss their Millennium Goal targets by 2015, over twenty are characterised by a failing state system. In these countries, there has been least progress in achieving the targets set in conjunction with the MDGs, particularly regarding Goal 1; many people do not earn anywhere near 1.25 dollars a day. Even worse: the value of 1.25 dollars a day is frequently not an adequate basis to measure quality of life. In many cases, inflation consumes increases in income, and a few cents more do not make up for lack of access to services or discrimination.

Neither has there been sufficient progress made in combating hunger around the world. Between 2006 and 2008, 850 million people were undernourished. This represents an increase in absolute terms (it was 848 million in the period from 1990 to 1992), although the proportion reduced slightly from 19.8 to 15.5 per cent. More money alone does not defeat hunger; there needs to be improved access as well as progress in productivity and in rural development.

2.2. Achieve Universal Primary Education (Goal 2)

Where education is concerned, the picture is ambivalent. Although the number of girls now attending primary school worldwide is getting much closer to the number of boys and the proportion of children completing primary school has increased sharply, girls, ethnic minorities, disabled children and children in conflict zones, rural areas and urban slums still have limited access to education. MDG 2 generally disregards the fact that the number of girls and boys at school does not say anything about the quality of education. Classes are frequently overcrowded and there are not enough teachers or teaching materials. Also, a child's learning outcome is affected by their health and nutrition and not merely by their school attendance. In secondary education, which the MDGs also disregard, dropout rates are high; female pupils in particular frequently leave school early because of housework or unwanted pregnancies. While primary school attendance rose from 80 to 88 per cent among the low & middle income countries in the period from 1999 to 2011, attendance at secondary school only improved from 47 to 59 per cent over the same period.⁶ That is insufficient. The consequences: young people have no or inadequate qualifications. In many countries, only few people can afford to send their children to private school; a two-class system robs most children of the chance of securing a good job.

The proportion of people in insecure employment only reduced marginally between 1991 and 2011; in absolute figures, it has actually increased by 136 million to 1.52 billion in the period from 2000 to today. This is due to the strong population growth in countries with insecure employment conditions. Youth unemployment is a serious problem in most countries.⁷ Social security systems are weak in developing and newly industrialised countries, in which 90 per cent of unemployed young people (between 15 and 24) live; the informal sector is booming and wages for young people are frequently too low. The labour market cannot absorb the high numbers of school leavers and new graduates. Technical jobs are often performed by unskilled or illiterate people and are held in low esteem. Conversely, many graduates cannot find a job because their skills do not match the requirements of the labour market. This increasing uncertainty



fuels social conflict and greatly reduces quality of life. In many cases there are only very few of the universities of applied sciences and vocational colleges that would be required. This is why it is important that the post-2015 agenda does not restrict the education goal to primary education and also sets benchmarks for quality instead of concentrating purely on numbers. Germany with its unique dual vocational education system can close a gap here, which would provide many people with the skills that are actually required in the labour market.

2.3. Ensure Environmental Sustainability (Goal 7)

This goal is necessary but not sufficient for climate and environmental protection. The target of halving the proportion of the global population without access to safe drinking water has been achieved, but once again rural areas lag clearly behind the cities. While global deforestation has slowed down, biological diversity continues to be at risk, with over-fishing having increased to a new high in 2008. The case of CO₂ emissions, which have risen almost continuously since 1990, demonstrates the fundamental dilemma of development and the environment particularly clearly. Whatever adds to people's prosperity puts a strain on the environment. To ensure that this detrimental impact is mitigated and irrevocable damage to the ecosystem can be avoided, economic systems must be transformed by efforts towards greater energy efficiency and renewable energies must be expanded on a large scale. These are precisely the topics currently under discussion at the Open Working Group. Whatever course the negotiations may take: environmental and development issues must be correlated. While developing countries in particular are still arguing that poverty reduction should not be neglected in favour of environmental and climate protection, some OECD states in particular are insisting on greater sustainability and calling on the global South to make commitments in this area.

3. PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The brainstorming process for a post-2015 agenda has so far been very diffuse. Both the UN and major bilateral development organisations as well as numerous NGOs have drafted their visions of future goals in various workshops and papers.⁸ The "High Level Panel" has presented its 40-page report with twelve goals and 54 targets ("A new global Partnership: eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development"). These proposals represent a purposeful continuation of the MDGs and also take into account some aspects that had been disregarded or covered insufficiently in the MDGs. One new aspect is the universality of the agenda, i.e. the fact that all countries bear responsi-

bility and have to make a contribution. People are talking about a global partnership of equals instead of a mere development agenda. This linguistic distinction may help to induce developing and newly industrialised countries to take on greater responsibility for their own development and, at the same time, abandon the idea that Official Development Assistance will continue to produce improvements in living conditions in any significant way. The contribution that development aid makes to the budgets of developing countries has been on a downward trend for years. Foreign direct investments, funds sent back home from abroad and trade are increasingly playing a larger role than ODA. Another new aspect is the fact that for the first time reference is made to pertinent matters of global significance, such as the stabilisation of the financial systems, climate change as well as peace and security. Similarly, inequality is included as a cross-cutting issue ("leave no one behind"). In future, targets should only be considered as having been achieved if disadvantaged groups have achieved them as well, and not just a pure percentage of the population.

The actual intergovernmental negotiations starting in early 2015 will show the extent to which certain goals, which relate to global collective goods or which require governments to give account of themselves, will fall prey to national interests. Germany should make special efforts to promote the inclusion of the following central goals proposed by the High Level Panel, as it can make special contributions in these areas:

1. Goal 3 ("Provide Quality Education and Lifelong Learning") specifies qualitative standards for primary education, demands access and measurable learning outcomes for secondary education as well as more technical and vocational education and training. Broadening the goal in this way is absolutely necessary to ensure access to decent jobs for more people. Goal 8 ("Create Jobs, Sustainable Livelihoods, and Equitable Growth") and specifically target 8b ("Decrease the number of young people not in education, employment or training") represents a crucial advancement on the MDGs. The lessons learnt from the "jobless growth" in developing countries have moved the focus away from "growth at any price" towards more and better jobs, particularly for the young. The German government homes in on these topics with respect to two of the goals in its own proposals: Goal 2 (of the German Key Points document): "Quality education and life-long learning for all" and Goal 9: "Create decent jobs and improve the global enabling economic environment".

→ **With its dual vocational education system, Germany plays a pioneering role globally where equipping people with vocational qualifications is concerned.**



This is one of the reasons why Germany has the lowest youth unemployment rate within the EU. The German development cooperation agencies should therefore expand instruments of vocational education further and focus even more on the dual vocational education system within their collaboration with the cooperation countries.⁹

2. Goal 7 (“Secure Sustainable Energy”) relates to renewable energies as well as energy efficiency. Issues related to sustainability pervade the entire catalogue (Goal 5 on food security, Goal 6 on water, Goal 9 on natural resources). The proposals by the German government include two major strategic areas relating to sustainability: “Preserve the natural resource base and ensure its sustainable use” (Goals 5-7) and “Achieve the creation of decent jobs and adequate income through ecologically sound growth” (Goals 8-10).

→ **Germany should offer technological solutions, where these are marketable, and forcefully promote the long-term benefits of the so-called “Energiewende” (energy transition) in its foreign policy. Surveys have shown that people in emerging economies have quite a positive view of the energy transition.¹⁰ In concrete terms, Germany should encourage other countries to look to Germany’s ambitious targets for renewable energies and energy efficiency as an inspiration for their own targets. The German government should make increased efforts to further technology exchange and reciprocal learning. This means technology transfer on the one hand, but also increased adoption of best practices from other emerging economies. Where improved energy efficiency is concerned, Germany could offer concrete recycling concepts as it has already achieved a high level of efficiency in its efforts to move towards a circular economy.**

Further areas where knowledge transfer is required include sustainable land use systems, best practice regarding biodiversity and conservation, efficient building restoration as well as increasing the efficiency of coal-fired power stations in newly industrialised countries. In these areas, Germany has a relatively high level of innovation, which can be made available globally to aid climate protection.

3. Goal 10 (“Ensure Good Governance and Effective Institutions”) comprises calls to provide free and universal legal identity, to ensure people enjoy freedom of speech, association, peaceful protest and access to independent

media and information, to increase public participation in political processes, to guarantee the public’s right to information and access to government data, and to reduce bribery and corruption and ensure officials can be held accountable. This is an ambitious goal, which refers back to parts of the Millennium Declaration that never made it into the MDGs. The German government also promotes political participation and good, transparent governance in its own Goal 12: “Ensure good governance and effective institutions”.

→ **In the intergovernmental negotiations, Germany should forcefully promote a goal on participation, accountability as well as freedom of the press and freedom of speech on this basis. For one, these are fundamental rights in accordance with the values we believe in, which should be open to all people. Secondly, open societies are better placed in the long term to achieve prosperity. There would also be fewer economic migrants as well as less breeding ground for crime, ethnic conflict and extremism.**

4. CONCLUSION

The High Level Panel has made some good proposals, which address many issues requiring reform that the MDGs had not covered. The German government picked up on these proposals in its paper “Post-2015 Agenda for Sustainable Development – Key Positions of the German Government”, providing an excellent basis for building on the MDGs. The important thing now is for countries to come together and agree concrete standards and targets on the basis of joint but differentiated responsibilities, willing to take a long-term view. It is also important to coordinate the post-2015 process with other international negotiations. The WTO, the G20, the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation as well as climate negotiations must be tied in with the post-2015 agenda process and they must make reference to each other. That is the only way for the UN to prevent parallel structures being established yet again. The major emerging economies and countries that pay relatively little regard to climate protection will probably be the most difficult negotiating partners in the efforts to get an ambitious post-2015 agenda accepted. It will depend on the political will of national governments as to whether the smallest common denominator in the UN negotiations will be sufficient to solve the largest common problems.

In Germany, global challenges have gained in importance for policy-making in virtually all federal government departments. Coherent action and joint thinking on development, economic and environmental policies are therefore indispensable as part of foreign policy activities. Germany



should make strenuous efforts to provide an input in areas where the country can offer success stories, experience and expertise, with the different departments working together. Germany's advice is held in high regard, particularly with respect to the implementation of greater political participation through democratic processes, greater equality through better education and training and greater sustainability through more climate-friendly economic activity. It is particularly in these areas that Germany should engage in proactive foreign policy work, pushing for commitment by its partners and expanding and deploying its own strengths in development, environmental and foreign trade policies.

- 1/ See: http://urbansdg.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/German_Key_Points_Post_2015_Agenda_1.pdf (last accessed on 3.4.2014).
- 2/ The Bertelsmann Transformation Index has this to say on the matter (translated): "The Arab world shows what can happen when such efforts do not come to fruition: while Egypt under Mubarak or Tunisia under Ben Ali were able to present impressive growth rates and conducted some reasonably successful economic reforms, they neglected the social sector. The impoverishment and lack of prospects particularly among rural and young groups of the population were tacitly accepted", see BTI 2012, "Wirtschaftliche Trends", http://www.bti-project.de/uploads/tx_jdownloads/Wirtschaftliche_Trends_BTI_2012.pdf, last accessed on 30.10.2013).
- 3/ On a review of the Millennium Development Goals see United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2013* (<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/report-2013/mdg-report-2013-english.pdf>, last accessed on 20.10.2013)
- 4/ See *The Economist*, "Not always with us", 1.6.2013 (<http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21578643-world-has-astonishing-chance-take-billion-people-out-extreme-poverty-2030-not>, last accessed on 23.10.2013).
- 5/ China represents one example of the successful fight against poverty going hand in hand with increasing inequality. On the one hand, the country is responsible for three quarters of global poverty reduction by lifting 600 million people out of extreme poverty between 1981 and 2010, lowering the rate from 84% to 10% during this period. On the other hand, inequality and therefore the risk of social conflict rose. While all developing countries excluding China grew by 3.8% in the years between 2000 and 2010 (compared to just 0.6% between 1980 and 2000) and therefore some 280 million people escaped extreme poverty outside China, similar achievements are unlikely in the coming years. Many people had subsisted just below the 1.25 dollars a day mark and therefore found it easy to rise above the threshold: see *The Economist* *ibid.*
- 6/ See The World Bank, "World Development Indicators in Education" 2013 (<http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/2.11>, last accessed on 24.10.2013).
- 7/ See Steffen Angenendt, Silvia Popp, "Jugendüberhang – Entwicklungspolitische Risiken, Chancen und Handlungsmöglichkeiten", *SWP-Studien* 2013/p. 12, June 2013.
- 8/ Further proposals came from the "Sustainable Development Solutions Network", "Global Compact" and from the United Nations Development Programme amongst others.
- 9/ See the motion put forward by the CDU/CSU and FDP parliamentary groups "Duale Ausbildung exportieren – Jugendarbeitslosigkeit in der Europäischen Union bekämpfen, kooperative Berufsbildung weltweit steigern" (<http://www.cducusu.de/GetMedium.aspx?mid=3123>, last accessed on 22.10.2013).
- 10/ On the perception of the German "Energiewende" in emerging countries see "Wahrnehmung der deutschen Energiewende in Schwellenländern – Ergebnisse einer qualitativen Expertenbefragung in Brasilien, China und Südafrika", Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung 2013 (http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_34940-544-1-30.pdf?130905092753, last accessed on 22.10.2013).