

Key outstanding issues in the post 2015 agenda and priorities for EU strategic engagement over the coming months

Commission issues paper

State of play in the Open Working Group

We are at a critical juncture in the preparation for the post-2015 framework: the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG SDG) is holding its last meeting on 14 – 18 July with a view to finalizing a proposal for SDGs that will be submitted to the UNSG and the UNGA. This will be an important input, alongside others and notably the report of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing, for the UNSG's Synthesis report which is supposed to be issued in November and provide the basis for intergovernmental negotiations.

The revised co-chairs' "zero draft" that is being negotiated in New York can overall be considered as a satisfactory result for the EU since it reflects in an appropriate manner the priorities identified as important by the EU and its MS, including goals on environmental aspects as well as a specific goal on peaceful societies, access to justice and capable institutions. In terms of targets, the co-chairs have significantly reduced their number, trying to retain a maximum of 5 or 6 relevant targets on substantive issues under each goal. On the less positive side, the revised "zero draft" not only contains a goal on means of implementation but also proposes targets on means of implementation under each goal, an approach which is far from being consensual in the OWG and raises many issues. An issue which needs to be addressed in a careful manner is climate change, in order to avoid duplicating and prejudging the UNFCCC (Conference of the Parties 21) negotiations.

The next phase

With the launch of the intergovernmental negotiations, probably from end 2014 and leading to the Summit in 2015, the EU should be ready to enter into detailed negotiations to define precise goals and targets. This will require continued detailed internal discussions during the remainder of 2014, building on the content of the Commission's Communication of 2 June and taking into account the UN debates. The objective is to adopt Council Conclusions towards the end of the year in order to provide a clear and detailed EU position leading into the 2015 summit negotiations.

Within this medium-term timeframe, the key priorities for the EU should be:

1. To agree the EU position on goals and targets. It is a priority to keep the overall framework clear; easy to communicate and triggering action, without losing key priorities for the EU.
2. To work towards a practical, fair agreement on the global partnership and means of implementation (MoI), as well as on monitoring and accountability.
3. To ensure that the EU takes an active part in the negotiations as a crucial player, both at the UN and with key partners.

As to relations with key partners, the EU is already mobilised and recently succeeded in agreeing a joint declaration on post-2015 with ACP countries. The EU should continue to reach out to individual countries as well as to groups such as LDCs, the SIDS and the AU, including around international conferences and events, in order to get a better understanding of other countries' views on key issues with the objective of pursuing successful alliance building.

Key issues for consideration

In the short term:

Outcome of the OWG. The EU welcomes the work of the OWG to date. Considering that the current document reflects its key priorities, the EU should aim at keeping its overall balance. At the same time, issues that require further work should not be agreed in a definitive form (most notably means of implementation and possible differentiation at target level).

In the medium term, issues which are likely to remain open for discussion in the coming months are:

Goals and targets. A framework with a limited number of goals could help to replicate the so-called "MDGs effect", i.e. the ability of the framework to be a powerful tool for mobilization. Similarly, while the overall thrust and scope of targets developed in the OWG should be supported, a further streamlining of targets may have to be considered. We will need to identify which kind of process could deliver such a simplification in the next stage of the debate.

Climate change/environmental issues. How to handle CC in the future framework remains controversial. While there are some calls to give a higher profile to climate concerns through an explicit goal, others would prefer to mainstream CC in the targets under several goals. In any case it will be important not to duplicate or prejudge the negotiations in the UNFCCC until the end of 2015. More generally, making sure that environmental issues are preserved in the next framework should be key for the EU.

Global partnership and Means of Implementation (MoI). Negotiations on the global partnership cannot be concluded at the OWG, because we are awaiting other important contributions, not least from the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing and next year's Conference on Financing for Development. Currently, there is a debate between those countries calling for specific MoI targets under each goal (resulting for instance in duplicative targets on financing or technology) and others in favour of a more coherent and comprehensive approach to a Global Partnership for the whole framework. The EU needs to continue to elaborate a constructive alternative approach to MoI, including policy coherence.

Peace and security; governance, rule of law, human rights. The result of the OWG is likely to preserve at least one goal dealing with issues relating to peace and security, human rights and governance. The EU has consistently advocated the need to address this issue under two separate goals but the importance of having these issues reflected in the final proposal of the OWG should not be underestimated. The EU should build on this achievement during the intergovernmental negotiations to make sure that these issues receive as much attention as possible.

Universality and differentiation. For the post 2015 framework to be universal it should be built around goals and targets that are of universal concern and relevant to all countries. All stakeholders should be engaged in its implementation. The framework should also reflect changing global realities and take into account the evolving capabilities of countries and economies to contribute to its implementation and thus depart from an obsolete North-South agenda. The EU should actively and constructively engage with its partners on the concrete implications of universality and differentiation for all countries avoiding an ideological debate on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility.

Questions for discussion

- Given the likely outcome of the OWG, should the EU support it as a good basis for further work notably on goals and targets?
- Which will be the priority issues and the red-lines for the EU and which approach should be followed to promote them over the next months?
- Should the EU develop an coherent and comprehensive proposal for the global partnership and the means of implementation and, if so, what should be its main elements?
- How should the EU best pursue its outreach activities, both in dealing with non-likeminded countries and potential allies?