

An EU for Sustainable Human Development?

- Analysis of the European Commission package November 2016 -

On 22 November 2016, the European Commission released a package including notably:

- **Our World, our Dignity, our Future: Proposal for a new European Consensus on Development.** This Communication is the European Commission proposal to revise the 2006 Consensus.
- **Next Steps for a Sustainable Future.** This Communication addresses the overall EU implementation of Agenda 2030, both internally and externally.
- **A renewed partnership with the countries of Africa, Caribbean and Pacific.** This Communication looks at the future of EU relations with these countries after the Cotonou agreement comes to an end in 2020.

These documents were highly awaited, as key steps for the EU to grab the new global framework of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. As they represent various expressions of the EU political strategy around sustainable development and development cooperation, this paper analyses them together in order to identify the overarching trends.

Human development is a key enabler for sustainable development and should be at the core of EU development cooperation. Gender equality, health and youth empowerment should notably be consistently prioritized in all policies and programmes if the EU wants to reach a truly transformative and systematic change for people and planet. In this context, investing in sexual and reproductive health and rights is an effective strategy to ensure sustainable development on the long-term. Therefore, this paper pays particular attention to the way in which the European Commission package addresses these issues.

COMMUNICATION ON A PROPOSAL FOR A NEW EUROPEAN CONSENSUS ON DEVELOPMENT – OUR WORLD, OUR DIGNITY, OUR FUTURE

The revision of the European Consensus on Development offers a crucial opportunity to tackle poverty and inequalities and adapt EU development cooperation to Agenda 2030. This section analyses the European Commission proposal for a new European Consensus on Development and highlights elements we welcome and which need to be kept and included in the Joint Statement by EC, EP and Council foreseen to be adopted in May 2017 in order to leave no one behind.

Reaffirming poverty eradication as the primary objective of EU development cooperation is welcome, as well as the explicit mentioning of a rights-based approach. However, inequalities (among and within countries) should have been given a more prominent place in the document in line with the critical place given to inequality in Agenda 2030 and the “Leave no one behind” principle and especially in the view of increasing inequalities within middle-income countries in which the majority of the world’s poor live today.

Finding the keys – a transformative proposal for human development?

Gender equality and women's and girl's empowerment (GEWE) are included not only as principles but also as cross-cutting priorities across the EU's external action and as key drivers for development with transformative potential, which is a welcome step forward from the previous Consensus. We appreciate the reference to the Gender Action Plan and its link to the implementation of Agenda 2030. However, this might not be sufficient if the GAP is not properly resourced and streamlined with all EU programmes, beyond the fact that the work plan is foreseen only until 2020. In addition, pre-conditions for GEWE are not stressed in the Communication; for example, that investment in sectors like health and education must be programmed in a gender sensitive way. Should these continue to be neglected, the EU will remain short in delivering on this decades-old commitment. Finally, discrimination based on sexual orientation is acknowledged, but gender identity is never mentioned.

Youth is also given a prominent place, while it was absent from the 2006 Consensus. This is particularly relevant given that this cohort, the largest the world has ever seen, is at the same time beneficiary and leader of Agenda 2030. We welcome the specific aim to harness the demographic youth dividend which is crucial to achieve sustainable development. However, the focus is put mainly on youth employment, participation and leadership rather than on inequalities and access to basic social services and rights. While the former is important, providing livelihoods to young generations is not enough if key enablers for human development are not put into place. The intersection of gender and youth is recognized through the inclusion of girls in the proposal, but there is no clear connection between health, education and access to sexual and reproductive health services, which is key to youth empowerment.

Health is recognized as the cornerstone of human dignity and prosperity. The importance of working towards universal health coverage is included for the first time (although excluded from global public goods included in political dialogue). However, the section includes only some of the targets of Agenda 2030 on health and leaves many others behind. The recognition of the importance of supporting partner countries in 'fulfilling their responsibility to strengthen their national policies and governance for the sustainable provision of essential services' is welcome. This support can and should be used in order to reinforce for example the Maputo Plan of Action and the Abuja target. However, this section is not gender-sensitive enough and it only commits to reducing child and maternal mortality without considering sexual and reproductive health as a pre-condition for better health (even though it is a key SDG target).

SRHR are acknowledged as a commitment in line with the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Cairo Programme of Action and the outcomes of their review conferences. There is however little progress from the 2006 Consensus and we would welcome further alignment with the recent Council Conclusions on Gender in Development (May 2015). We notably regret that SRHR are only related to women's and girls' empowerment. While SRHR are indeed critical to achieve gender equality, they are also a key component of good health (SDG 3), poverty eradication and human rights and thus, should be recognized as a key driver with transformative potential for multi-dimensional poverty-eradication as in the 2006 Consensus and to improve economic and social prospects of youth.



Finally, **marginalized groups** are only addressed in terms of vulnerability. Multiple discriminations are recognized; however, the agency of underrepresented groups and their role as actors of change are not acknowledged.

Sustainable development: what, for whom? An outlook on securitization and privatisation

Official Development Aid must remain the backbone of EU aid for development and cooperation. The long-standing commitment towards 0.7% ODA/GNI is mentioned, however often together with other funding schemes like blending facilities, private contributions and innovative financing mechanisms. The role of ODA in serving the poorest and most vulnerable is acknowledged only once. We welcome the inclusion of the development effectiveness principles, which are fundamental. We would hence welcome specific reference as to how ODA will target those sectors that are fundamental for human development, as the Agenda for Change lists 20% of funding to this end.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are recognized as advocates and implementers, including in joint actions. However, their necessary involvement at all policy-making stages (planning, programming, implementation, evaluation and monitoring) is not mentioned and civil society is absent from the principles and values laid down in the document. A stronger involvement of civil society is essential to ensure social accountability and democratic legitimacy and thus, promoting open, transparent and inclusive dialogues with citizens, local authorities and civil society organisations, and should be emphasized. Finally, support to CSOs could be considered in the context of aid differentiation, as a means of cooperation with middle-income countries.

This is especially important in a multi-stakeholder environment with public and private, profit and non-profit oriented actors. The proposal grants a key role to the **private sector** as an engine for long-term sustainable development. It is striking that it is mentioned as often as poverty, the primary objective of EU development cooperation, without any direct mention to the role of the private sector in this objective. While we recognise the potential role of private sector, we would recommend that it only occurs after proper impact assessments and based on transparency and equity principles as laid out in the UN Guiding principles on business and human rights.

Migration needs to be addressed with full respect of humanitarian and human rights obligations of the EU and the Member States. Providing access to health and education services, including SRH, is particularly important to ensure youth and women's integration and empowerment. This further helps delivering the demographic dividend. However, the link between health and migration is not explicitly made, besides a reference that addressing migration allows to address other cross-cutting issues – rather than the other way around. The proposal addresses migration largely as a threat, focusing on root causes and prevention, which is a leap from the 2006 Consensus that highlighted migration as a positive force for development. Similarly, **peace** is linked only with security issues while barely considering the importance of inclusive and participatory processes (eg social accountability). The proposal opens to door to the use of development cooperation for security and military actions, which we find very worrying.



The importance of **Science, Technology and Innovation** (STI) is well recognised as a Means of implementation of the Agenda. But we would welcome further emphasis of this means applied to those specific sectors fundamental to human development: STI need to be prioritised to address global health challenges like antimicrobial resistance and longstanding poverty-related and neglected diseases like HIV/AIDS, Malaria or Tuberculosis, in addition to neglected tropical diseases.

Disaggregated data, which is critical to identify and act upon inequalities, is mentioned in the context of the EU support to partner countries, to improve their analysis, monitoring and evaluation capacity of developing countries. Gender and age are included as categories, however the proposal mentions that data will only be disaggregated where possible.



JOINT COMMUNICATION ON A RENEWED PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COUNTRIES OF AFRICA, THE CARIBBEAN AND THE PACIFIC

This section presents a brief analysis of the Joint Communication on a renewed partnership with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and the main building blocks proposed by the Commission and the High Representative for the future ACP-EU relations. This Communication puts forward an umbrella agreement with regional partnerships for Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, which address the specific regional opportunities and challenges and are based on a set of specific priorities.

We welcome the Commission and High Representative Joint Communication on a renewed partnership with the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

We are very pleased to note that the proposed partnership is intended to build on the 2030 Agenda. However, we believe the **2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** should be more clearly and systematically embedded in the proposed future partnership and its specific priorities. In order to ensure that the EU's relationship with its partners in ACP countries leads to end poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, leaving no one behind, we must further strengthen the synergies between social, economic and environmental priorities, focusing in particular on the poorest and most vulnerable.

It would also be useful if the current proposal included clear consideration of how it builds on the Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy and links up with the Commission proposal on the European Consensus on Development.

Whilst we welcome the overall objectives set out in the proposal, we recognise that the present document represents more of a broad view of EU's strategic interests and objectives than a detailed partnership strategy. We feel however that these guidelines are missing some pre-conditions for the success of the revised partnership.

Ensuring a partnership for human development?

We particularly support the focus on human rights as specific priorities and the emphasis on **gender equality**, the most vulnerable people and youth in the mutual efforts towards democratic governance and human rights for all. This includes the stress on the importance of a joint commitment to fully protect, promote and realise gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. The recognition of their key contribution to peace and state-building, economic growth, technological development, poverty reduction, health and well-being, culture and human development is also welcome to see. However, the Communication fails to address which areas should be prioritised in order to achieve gender equality (eg SRHR). The CPA adopted this approach and we would welcome this acquis to be kept. Such omission might perpetuate the insufficient progress in this front, as the recently published EC evaluation of the partnership showed (*'EU's strong policy commitments on gender equality and the*



empowerment of women have not always been matched by its organisational capacity to deliver results’).

We strongly agree that gender equality plays a critical role in sustainable development, as underlined in the 2030 Agenda, and therefore call for the objective of empowerment of women, youth and vulnerable groups, by promoting equal access to quality education and vocational training, social protection, health, including reproductive health care, along with the representation in political and economic decision-making processes, to be pursued everywhere and not only in Africa as set out in the Communication.

The elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls and of harmful practices are also noticeably lacking in the current specific objectives, and the fight against gender-based violence does not appear as a priority for all regions. This goes against the overall objective of the revised partnership to strengthen resilience and address chronic vulnerability in ACP countries. Yet, we know these remain persistent challenges for ACP countries, as the current ACP National Indicative Programmes confirm, and a major obstacle for gender equality and sustainable development.

We welcome the acknowledgement of **young people** as the engine for the future social, economic and environmental well-being of their communities. However, we note that the present proposal fails to address the key enablers to youth empowerment by focusing mainly on employment opportunities. We firmly believe that if the new ACP-EU partnership is to deliver on the improvement of youth well-being and the full enjoyment of their rights and fundamental freedoms, it must commit to ensuring their access to not only resources, quality formal and non-formal education and vocational training, information and education, decent jobs, social protection and participation in the society and decision-making across all regions, but also access to health, including reproductive and sexual health services. The importance of addressing the different needs of this important cohort is already recognized in the CPA and this acquis should not be lost.

We welcome the focus on **human development** as one of the priorities of the revised partnership, especially considering that some ACP countries currently have the lowest human development index. It is important that these priorities align with the 2030 Agenda to make its maximum contribution to cross-cutting SDG implementation and get a consistent picture of performance at various levels. Therefore, we would like to see a more comprehensive approach to health and well-being across all regions, upholding major **health** priorities, notably health systems strengthening, including the access to family planning and sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the fight against poverty-related and neglected diseases. Moreover, through its political dialogue, the EU can also support partner countries in implementing national policies and in ensuring a comprehensive approach to sectors like health, by reinforcing e.g. the Maputo Plan of Action or the Abuja target in Africa.

The CPA is unprecedented in its comprehensive approach to social and human development as it aims at integrating population issues in all development strategies. This approach has however fell short in its implementation, leading to another weakness in the ACP-EU evaluation (*‘Population growth has not received sufficient attention and is, in many ACP countries, becoming a significant factor*

contributing to potential vulnerability'). We would hence encourage this acquis to be kept, also in line with the Health SDG, and would welcome a stronger focus on the integration of population matters into all development policies under the revised partnership. The correlation between demographic pressure and human rights or well-being is fundamental in this context. Only this way would it be possible to ensuring key enablers for human development are put in place while supporting the demographic dividend and guaranteeing the well-being of all. In this context, we would encourage further emphasis on programmes that address **sexual and reproductive health and rights**, including access to family planning, through a human-rights based approach; instead of the singular focus on reproductive health care, as mentioned under the revised partnership with Africa.

The Communication recognises the importance of **Science, Technology and Innovation (STI)** as key for economic investment; however, should the revised partnership aim at continuously contributing to 'improved and more equitable access to basic services', there should also be a recognition of the need of investing in STI that serve human wellbeing. STI should hence be prioritised to address global health threats, considering the growing burden these represent in ACP countries.

Sustainable development: how and with whom?

We highlight that these objectives cannot be achieved without **ODA** to match so along with them it is vital that the previous investment commitments to human development, including health and education, are also renewed in the future partnership. We would hence encourage specific reference to the Agenda for Change benchmark of 20% funding earmarked to human development.

We further call for the revised partnership to be grounded on the **development effectiveness principles** (ie ownership, transparency, mutual accountability and focus on results) and Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD).

While we recognise the potential role of **private sector**, we would recommend that it occurs only after proper impact assessments are carried and based on transparency and equity principles, in line with the UN guiding principles on business and human rights. We also stress that the priority of the new partnership should be given to small scale producers and farmers and on securing an enabling environment for micro, small and medium size enterprises (MSMEs).

We further welcome the multi-stakeholder dimension of the proposed partnership and the recognition of the need for a stronger role of **civil society** (CS) in the future relationship. Also in this context the CPA has showed to be unprecedented in its commitment to engage CS in all phases of the partnership. But despite the multiple provision confirming this CS diverse roles, implementation fell short (as shown by the EC evaluation '*CSOs involvement in the implementation and in particular in the monitoring of public action indicates varying (and often reduced) spaces to exist and operate should be kept*'). The CPA acquis on civil society participation should be kept and reinforced in order to guarantee that the revised partnership is inclusive and fosters participation of all. We look forward to understanding how the EU intends to ensure that civil society, as independent development actor in their own right and with an essential role to play in the ACP-EU relations, is fully and meaningfully engaged in the design, implementation and monitoring, accountability and review of the new partnership.

COMMUNICATION ON NEXT STEPS FOR A SUSTAINABLE EUROPEAN FUTURE

As the first year of implementation of the 2030 Agenda is coming to an end, this long-awaited Communication was expected to clarify the way the EU would adapt its internal and external policies and programmes, following its commitment to the Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). During the negotiations on the 2030 Agenda as well as its adoption at the Summit in September 2015, the EU expressed that *“business as usual is no longer an option”*¹ and that it is time to *“take action at all levels”*². In 2015, first Vice-President Frans Timmermans stated that *“we are determined to implement the 2030 Agenda which will shape our internal and external policies, ensuring the EU plays its full part”*³.

However, in the light of these strong words by the EU and its Member States, the Communication is vague and superficial. It is based on ‘business as usual’ by primarily mapping existing European strategies and policies and framing them in the context of the SDGs. It lacks critical self-reflection on how the ‘European way of life’ for some may inhibit sustainable development for others, and omits any long-term perspective on how the ‘transformative’ nature of the Agenda moves beyond words and becomes a reality.

Fulfilling the ambition of the 2030 Agenda requires action today, while the Communication postpones any necessary policy changes to 2020. The first critical four years of the 2030 Agenda implementation are lost, although we know that changing social norms, including in relation to human rights, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights requires urgent, strong and consistent efforts.

Key areas of Agenda 2030: what are the EU plans?

Human rights and **gender equality** are described in the Communication as being ‘enshrined’ and ‘anchored’ in the ‘European political and legal framework, and as ‘at the core of European values’. In section 2.2 under the Commission’s Priority 7, the Commission mentions the necessity for active policies to promote gender equality as many gaps towards realizing the SDG-targets remain. Although the EU’s commitment to ‘promote women’s rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as a priority across all areas of external action’ is reaffirmed, the Commission fails to give more detail on how the EU will do so internally and externally. The Gender Action Plan (GAP) is listed in the Staff Working Document, but omitted in the Communication itself. Furthermore, a cross-cutting gender perspective is missing, including in the sections focusing on economic growth, health, environmental challenges, and on the EU’s humanitarian assistance. References to gender in the

¹ Council of the European Union (2014). A transformative post-2015 agenda. 16 December 2014

² European Commission (2015). Communication: A Global Partnership for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development after 2015. 5 February 2015

³http://collections.internetmemory.org/haeu/content/20160313172652/http://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2015/280915_sustainable_development_2030_agenda_en.htm



Communication mainly relate to employment issues, notably pay and pension gaps, while omitting the social and cultural factors underlying violence and discrimination against women.

The Communication does not reflect upon the EU's role in improving **sexual and reproductive health and rights** (SRHR), included under the health (SDG 3.7) and gender (SDG 5.6) Goals, even though SRHR was a main topic for the EU during the negotiations for the 2030 Agenda⁴. The EU directly contributes to achieving SDG 3.7 and 5.6 externally, mainly through the Gender Action Plan (GAP) and through investments in sexual and reproductive health and family planning as part of the budget-line on Human Development (DCI). It remains however unclear which internal European policies and investments contribute to these targets or whether additional action is needed.

Investing in **youth** is described as essential to preserve the European social model and social cohesion in the introduction, particularly in relation to internal challenges such as youth unemployment. Despite this recognition, the Commission fails to recognize young people as active citizens that should be empowered to shape the strategies and policies that are needed to realize the 2030 Agenda. In addition, no mention is made of young people's needs and rights, particularly in relation with basic social services under external action. Investment in the empowerment of and opportunities for young people beyond the EU's borders needs to be recognized as key for sustainable development and the realization of the SDGs.

Ensuring accountability

The Communication provides a strong commitment to contribute to the follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda at national, regional and global level. This consists of regular reporting on the EU's contribution towards the High Level Political Forum and by carrying out a detailed regular monitoring of the SDGs in the EU context based on a reference indicator framework that is to be developed.

It remains however unclear how the EU plans to contribute to the regional follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda at the UNECE, where an annual Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is planned to take place. In addition, we are concerned that civil society is not mentioned as a key actor to ensure accountability for the realization of the Agenda, while this was again a main issue in the EU's position during the inter-governmental negotiations for the Agenda. Civil society is only mentioned in relation to the implementation (p.17). Although we welcome the launch of a multi-stakeholder platform, it should strive to be representative, and go beyond a mere facilitation of 'exchange' to allow for scrutiny and accountability by civil society of the EU's and its Member States' role in implementation of the Agenda. Finally, it is a missed opportunity that civil society were not involved by the Commission when developing this Communication.

⁴ See EU statement during the inter-governmental negotiations for the post-2015 agenda, 20 July 2015 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/15748eu2.pdf>

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations apply to the package as a whole. For specific recommendations on one of the Communications, please refer to the dedicated section.

- It is of utmost importance to ensure that the primary objective of development cooperation remains, as laid out in the Treaties, the eradication of **poverty**. This should not only be reiterated as a principle but also be the effective priority for all EU policies and programmes. Development cooperation should not be used to manage migration, security and the private sector, although synergies do exist and can be taken into account.
- **Agenda 2030** and the Sustainable Development Goals must be more systematically and consistently embedded in these key EU policies. Agenda 2030 is a multi-faceted and comprehensive framework that tackles all three aspects of sustainable development: social, environmental and economic. Therefore, all goals and targets are of importance and should be addressed.
- **Gender equality** is consistently recognized as a key, cross-cutting principle of EU development cooperation. This is welcome, but it is not new. The omission in the different Communications of pre-conditions that should be fulfilled in order to achieve gender equality narrow down the expectations. Moreover, gender equality remains absent from sections dedicated to means of implementation, policy dialogue, joint programming...which invalidates the importance given to it. This is not enough if the EU wants to play a transformative role for gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment.
- **Human development** is of critical importance to sustainable development and goes beyond employability. Due to an enduring focus on growth and migration control, the provision of jobs is deemed a priority. Jobs are important but not enough if people, especially young people, do not have access to basic social services and are able to enjoy healthy and educated lives. In particular, access to education and health should be considered as key, cross-cutting priorities, taking into account the agency of targeted groups to harness their potential.
- Investments in the **health** sector are fundamental in order to achieve not only human development and dignity, but also overall sustainable development due to the spillover effect of this sector. For this reason, the EU should adopt a comprehensive approach to health that leaves no one behind (instead of only naming some targets under the SDGs, as in the case of the Consensus).
- **SRHR**, being a key driver with transformative potential for multi-dimensional poverty-eradication, should be always recognized as a pre-condition for both healthy lives and gender equality. In this context, attention to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) must

be stepped up. SRHR are unfortunately still treated as a niche issue, while they are of utmost importance for gender equality, youth empowerment and human development and ultimately poverty eradication. This represents little progress from previous EU approaches and the recognition of SRHR as key drivers for sustainable development is still missing. The EU position has been incoherent in this front, as shown in this package: the EC recognizes EU action in this domain only under ‘health’ in the Communication on Agenda 2030, but only under ‘gender equality’ in the Communication on the Consensus.

- The Communications give little detail as to how the EU plans to contribute to sustainable development in the future. The EU must move beyond reiterating principles and lay out its approach to the **implementation** of Agenda 2030, notably in key areas such as gender equality, youth empowerment, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- The role of **civil society**, and civil society organizations (CSOs) needs to be fully recognized. Civil society is not only an implementation actor but has also a key role to play in ensuring global accountability for sustainable development. If the EU policies on development cooperation truly want to reach out to the poorest and most vulnerable, CSOs need to be acknowledged as a key link, and the balance between civil society and the interests of the private sector must be clearly defined. This is of even more importance considering the role CSOs can and should have in the monitoring, accountability and review for the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

