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The Charter for the Future: A Southern perspective

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Bonn, 4 February 2015. In the spirit of the post-2015 agenda Germany, through the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), presented the Charter for the Future (*Zukunftscharta*) in November 2014. Coincidentally, a few days later the United Nations (UN) published "The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet", Ban Ki-moon's Synthesis Report of taking stock of the negotiations on the post-2015 Agenda and his suggestions for sustainable development goals (SDGs). In its *Zukunftscharta* the BMZ presents a road map of political priorities for the next three years – the remaining time in office for the present German government as well as a critical period of time defining the post-2015 agenda with its sustainable development goals and achieving a post-Kyoto agreement at the climate change summit in Paris.

A remarkable issue in the configuration of this Charter was an open and inclusive approach with different key stakeholders linking the German government with society (academy, private sector, civil society, etc.), transforming the outcome into a common set of goals with a wide consensus and providing fields of collaboration for all. Hence, the Charter reflects the commitment of one country with values and challenges with respect to development cooperation, based on a sustainable and fair approach, with common responsibilities and promoting a global agenda.

The *Zukunftscharta* is comprehensive and proactive, centred on the importance of sustainability. Beyond concepts or ideas the Charter recognizes that the patterns of production and consumption are key aspects in the coming years to tackle the challenges of development and reduce climate change pressure. In that regard the Charter's objectives associated with the protection of natural resources, the one on economic growth and the one on a global partnership for sustainable development, seem to be the cornerstones of this proposal.

In this way, the proposal seems to be perfectly comprehensive. However, at the end there is a feeling that the Charter is merely a summary of what we have reached and learnt in the past decades of development cooperation. What is missing are innovations of how to reduce poverty and achieve development beyond the innovative and inclusive process to shape the Charter. Moreover, the Charter does not address how Germany considers getting support from the multilateral system, from Europe, and from the developed countries. Or, put differently, which are the promising strategies to cooperate with emerging or low income countries on trade and

investment, South-South cooperation or climate change? For example, there is no reference to the "common but differentiated responsibilities" approach in the Charter. Even if there is "One World" with strong interdependences, there is no "one size fits all" solution for its problems.

The Charter shows a clear effort translating local perceptions and desires into global proposals and solutions, but lacks proposals at the sectoral and actor level. The proposals address an abstract policy level – but the last decades of efforts on development have shown that most of the times the big ideas fail "on the ground". In that regard, the German strategy must guarantee the translation of good intentions into facts. The seventh priority area of the Charter can be an example of such a challenge: "Drive transformational change through innovation, technology and digitalisation". The perception is that the Charter, inspired by the enormous expansion of information technology in many aspects of modern life, puts trust in the use of innovation and technology in areas such as poverty, hunger, health, medical services or climate change. But what does this mean when most poor people, in urban or rural areas, do not know how to read or write? How will they be able to use IT? So, there should be special attention directed to avoiding the technological gaps in poor countries, preventing the marginalisation of those who are already marginalised. Close cooperation between governments and the owners of such technologies could be a way to replicate solutions for the poor.

A final concern is the issue of inequality among countries and citizens. It seems that the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) advanced on reducing the number of poor people and now the SDGs intend to raise the quality of life and dignify to the rest, but little is said on how to balance the gap between rich and poor. The Charter emphasizes the need to focus on the poorest and most vulnerable groups, but does not provide ideas how this could work effectively. In sum, the most important issues for the future remain unsolved: How can we balance consumption, profits, wages, technology access and income? Which measures can we introduce to avoid financial crises that have been costly for many governments? And how can we rebuild the eroded welfare state?

I do not discard Germany has already an answer, so it would be interesting to see it. Meanwhile, the Charter for the Future is a voice to listen, a proposal to believe in, a move to follow, and a national effort to be emulated by many countries no matter the geography.