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Second step taken towards sustainable development goals

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Second step taken towards sustainable development goals

Bonn, 21 July 2014. On 19 July 2014 the United Nations published a set of 17 goals for global sustainable development that all UN member states should pursue after 2015 – both in their own national territory and in the form of international co-operation. These goals were agreed on by the approximately 70 members of the open working group (OWG), which was formed in January 2013; Germany played an active part in the negotiations, as part of a tripartite group with Switzerland and France.

This common set of goals is intended to build on and replace the millennium development goals (MDGs) that structured development co-operation (DC) between 2000 and 2015. The new goals are significantly different to the MDGs: they commit all states to change, not just poor countries. The aim is to reduce poverty and inequality, but not at the expense of nature:

- The objective is not only to eliminate extreme poverty by 2030, but also to halve the number of people living below national poverty lines. In Germany around 15 percent of the population currently live below the poverty line, approximately 12 million people.
- A global partnership is to be created to reduce inequality between countries. The intention is for this partnership to utilise north-south cooperation as well as south-south and triangular cooperation, and above all to strengthen domestic revenue of developing countries via improved tax systems and the combating of illicit financial flows. An open, rule-based and fair multilateral trading system is called for, to enable the poorest countries to double their share of global exports by 2020. This stands in contrast to the trade and investment treaties currently being negotiated by the US with Europe and Asian countries.
- All countries commit themselves to making their production and consumption more environmentally friendly. All countries are to take action while the rich countries should take the lead, to reduce waste generation, manage chemicals and other wastes in an environmentally sound way throughout their life cycle, waste less food and reduce post-harvest losses. Companies should be "encouraged" to conduct environmental reporting; an obligation to do this was apparently unfeasible.
- Protection of terrestrial and marine ecosystems takes a somewhat more specific form: all countries commit themselves to "strive to achieve a land-degradation neutral world" (a stronger word than "strive" would have been desirable here), and commit themselves to reducing marine pollution, with

the goal of establishing protected areas for at least 10 percent of the oceans and coasts by 2020 as well as tackling over-fishing.

This is a good result, despite the fact that in some cases the goals are not as ambitious as I would wish them to be.

The set of goals is by no means brief: instead of eight to ten, there are a total of 17 goals. The OWG has shown courage in including the many facets of sustainable development and addressing a number of gaps in effective international action, for example regarding marine protection and sustainable urbanisation. However, there is no commitment to limit and reduce arms exports and put a halt to the trafficking in human beings.

All of the goals include quantified targets, most with specified time lines, which integrate economic, social and ecological aspects. This does not facilitate memorizing them, but does make them more specific.

Overall, the OWG has presented a set of goals that can justifiably claim to represent "an integrated, indivisible set of global priorities for sustainable development", with "aspirational global targets with each government setting its own national targets guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances".

It has thereby fulfilled the task assigned to it by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2012. This first step has now been followed by a second, namely the presentation of the set of goals. The third step is now to confirm the central elements of the set of goals, even though consolidation is still required, and to develop an implementation and monitoring system that facilitates progress and ensures accountability. This will be the crux of the new global agenda: will governments manage to take their own negotiation outcomes seriously enough to incorporate them into national policy that results in no or at least few negative international effects? That shares increased income more fairly and provides better protection for the soil, plants, animals and the climate?

Germany has two instruments that could contribute to the effective implementation of the new agenda: the national strategy for sustainable development can be improved and focused in the light of the new global agenda. The Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is working with German civil society to draw up a future charter that sets priorities for mutual action for one world – in accordance with the new agenda and with the involvement of further ministries.