

Beyond 2015 European task force reaction to the zero draft outcome document for the post-2015 sustainable development agenda

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As a contribution to the EU's current discussions on the zero draft of the outcome document for the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, the Beyond 2015 European task force would like to underline key issues which we believe need improvement.

The zero draft of the outcome document claims to prioritize people and planet, but in reality seems to have lost the ambition that we have seen earlier in the process. People, Planet and Prosperity is the slogan but the selected goal areas (which strongly resemble the current MDGs) identified in the preamble undermines the comprehensiveness of the agenda and the original transformative vision.

The desire that the Agenda should be bold and transformative is re-iterated but is not carried through in concrete steps by addressing system change nor in confronting the status quo. The importance placed on economic growth – even recurrent calls for “sustained” economic growth – is evidence of this. The concept of growth being constrained within ecological or planetary boundaries is not mentioned, nor that the function of the economy should be to serve people and planet and not the other way round.

There is still a pledge to leave no-one behind and a desire to see goals and targets met for all economic and social groupings, but this is contradicted by some targets which aim at reducing or improving by proportions/percentages, which will inevitably leave quite a lot of people behind. While the fruit may not be hanging so low as under the MDGs, the hardest to reach will still be the ones to lose out.

Integrate fully the three dimensions of sustainable development

The need to address the three dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced way is recognised, along with the importance of integration and integrated solutions as well as the interlinkages and interdependencies across the goals and targets. But the intent to integrate is not obviously translated into the new parts of the framework.

Universality means all countries, all goals

A strong sentence is included in paragraph 14: *“Universal goals which transcend the traditional North/South divide and involve the entire world, rich and poor alike.”* Furthermore, the same paragraph refers to *“a set of integrated and indivisible goals”* which balance the three dimensions of sustainable development. This statement on indivisibility makes the universality principle even stronger.

Achieve equality

First of all, the text should refer to the elimination of discrimination on any ground and of any kind throughout the document for instance in the preamble, and in the introduction. The list provided in paragraph 17 excludes some key criteria such as age, HIV, marital status, sexual orientation and gender identity. It should also refer to all human rights, and add free of discrimination, coercion and violence.

In addition, instead of using wording such as *“combating inequalities”* (cf. preamble and paragraph 18) which focuses on action, the text should commit to outcome and use the corresponding terminology such as *“elimination of discrimination”*. It is regrettable that in the specific paragraph 18 on gender equality, no mention is made of the importance of eliminating the multiple discrimination women and girls face, as this is critical to achieve transformative change.

There should be mention in this paragraph of fulfilling the human rights of all women and girls and full and equal participation in decision-making across social, cultural, economic, and political life. Likewise on quality education, particular attention should be given to girls.

Empower people through participation

References to participation of all people in decision-making processes, especially women, girls, youth and marginalized groups, are very weak. However we know that the active participation of people in

decision-making processes produces better outcomes for all. The post-2015 framework must ensure that people are enabled to shape their own lives by giving them opportunities to participate meaningfully in decision-making which affects them. In order to enable people's participation in decision-making processes, they must be transparent, open, inclusive and safe. For this to be the case, civil and political rights must be realized, such as granting free and full access to information, freedom of expression, assembly and association and freedom of the media. There is insufficient reference to the importance of these rights in the zero draft.

Introduce alternative measures of progress

The vision set out in paragraph 15, describes what an alternative vision of progress and well-being might look like, although, unfortunately, it fails to include any of the critical elements of planetary "well-being". However, this alternative vision is not translated into a real call to introduce alternative measures of progress in the Opening Declaration and thus there is no impetus to make the requisite changes in mind-set needed to bring such a vision about. This is reinforced by the fact that the plan to develop measures of progress towards sustainable development to complement GDP is hidden as the 19th target under SDG 17. And thus it is a missed opportunity for transformative change.

Implement policy coherence for sustainable development

The fundamental importance of policy coherence for sustainable development – as an enabler – is missing from the Declaration. It remains as a target for systemic issues under SDG17 (17.14). Without a strong call for policy coherence for sustainable development at all levels and by all governments, there is an ongoing danger that any commitments which are put in place to deliver on SDGs, will be undermined by other policies and actions with negative impacts on people and planet. In fact, policy coherence for sustainable development, because it is an approach which deliberately seeks to identify the interlinkages and interdependencies between policy areas, is the ideal means to balance the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in decision-making.

Clarify the global partnership

We emphasize that governments are the primary duty-bearers in its country in terms of realising people's human rights and sustainable development. The responsibility allocated to non-state actors must therefore be carefully thought through so as to avoid an abdication of responsibility by States, whilst at the same time balancing that against the need to ensure that all actors are held accountable for their role in implementing the framework. That raises a further question regarding the accountability of the private sector, given that there are few appropriate and rigorous mechanisms in place.

Measuring up to commitments: Accountability

Although the post-2015 agenda is supposed to be by and for the people, however the section on follow-up and review is weak on participation, transparency and accountability mechanisms. The word "accountability" appears just twice – in paragraph 38 of the Opening Declaration and para 1 under section III Follow-up and Review. True accountability is far more comprehensive than a system of follow-up and review, or even monitoring and reporting.

We recommend that rigorous, independent and appropriate accountability mechanisms should be identified and/or developed for the post-2015 agenda which will allow the international community to report on and evaluate progress towards the SDGs - including their targets and means of implementation. The Beyond 2015 European task force specifically recommends that the EU pushes for the establishment of legitimate and adequate systems of responsibility, accountability and transparency for all duty-bearers of the framework, and expected contributions from the private sector. Accountability mechanisms must be guaranteed at the local and national levels in addition to the global level, and they must envisage a central role for the contributions of civil society and individuals, particularly those experiencing poverty, inequality and marginalization. For people to be able to participate and hold their government to account effectively, an enabling environment must be created – which implies the realisation of civil and political rights such as freedom of expression, association and of information.