

MINUTE OF THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY BOARD MEETING ON MDGS & POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Chatham House Rules

BRUSSELS, 13 SEPTEMBER 2012

Introduction

The Scientific Advisory Board on EU Development Policy (SAB) met on 13 September in Brussels to discuss the MDGs and the post-2015 development framework. Andris Piebalgs, European Commissioner for Development then met with Members of the Scientific Advisory Board over lunch for an exchange of views. In particular the Commissioner wished to consult with the Board in the light of his appointment as a member of the High Level Panel on the post-Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agenda beyond 2015. The first meeting of the High Level Panel will be held on the 25th of September.

The Board was informed that in parallel Commission services are preparing a Communication for publication in January 2013 proposing EU principles for a post-2015 development framework as the EU's initial contribution to the multilateral process. As part of the preparatory work for this Communication, the public consultation on "Towards a Post-2015 Development Framework" will convey the views of different stakeholders. At the same time the Rio+20 follow-up, in particular the Sustainable Development Goals, will also have an impact on the Post-2015 process. Members States are expected to have an orientation debate on the post-2015 development agenda in the autumn. The forthcoming independent European Report on Development will also focus on post-2015 and aims at informing and enriching the EU's reflection on the post-2015 framework and contributing to the global debate. The SAB meeting was an opportune moment to address a number of issues that were then taken up with the Commissioner over lunch.

The Commissioner very much welcomed the opportunity to discuss with the SAB Members the issues related to the post-2015 development agenda. In particular he emphasised that the new framework should be practical and measurable and not simply aspirational, a 'framework that works'. In that connection, a poverty-focused framework was attractive, especially directed to the poorest countries and fragile states as poverty would be concentrated in such countries in the 2020s.

The Commissioner acknowledged the importance of the environment or green growth agenda and the need for a broader debate to frame the discussion, but recognised the difficulties of translating global goals in national commitments in this context. It would be very important to change the message on environment and make it more about people. The process ahead should be inclusive to make sure that nobody loses out and in particular it is crucial to work with India, China and Brazil in designing new MDGs.

Meeting Mandate

SAB Members were invited to express their views on the public consultation on "Towards a Post-2015 Development Framework". Four key issues were then communicated to Board¹ for discussion on the 13 September:

- A universal approach such as the SDGs should be global in nature and universally applicable, promoting sustainable development for all countries at all stages of development, while on the other hand the MDGs focus primarily on poverty eradication. The Millennium Declaration reflected the broadest consensus on development. How can a universal framework be achieved without losing a specific development focus?
- How can the dilemma of global character of goals be reconciled with nationally adapted targets and indicators be concretely envisaged? Should a framework be created in which it is possible to measure relative progress, in line with principles of national ownership and responsibility, addressing in particular the lack of progress in conflict affected and fragile states?
- How can the EU promote an integrated approach to achieve partnership for a future development framework, including financing, coherent with the Financing for Development process and a "beyond aid" approach? Should a more coherent global accountability mechanism be part of it?
- What role should the EU play in these processes, what alliances and support can be established and what kind of role should be envisaged for the EU in the future?

The issues of governance, security and fragile states were also raised.

MDGs

The Board discussed the rationale, context, design and achievements of the current MDGs. The Millennium Development Goals, embedded in the Millennium Declaration, have been a success. In particular, they contributed to: mobilising public and political opinion; restoring confidence in the purpose and value of development aid; rescuing aid from a declining trend in the 1990s; and, most important, delivering real benefits, especially in the fields of health and education, to many millions of poor people.

The MDGs worked as a technical and political project. It was emphasised that they were designed to solve a specific problem, that is to say declining levels of enthusiasm for, and volumes of aid in the post-Cold War period. They had succeeded because they had 'ethical bite', with the capacity to mobilise people; and because they were clear and measurable. These advantages notwithstanding, there were well-known problems with confusion between ends and means, and lack of guidance on trade-offs (e.g. between goals and between countries). Not all the Goals will be met and some (e.g. environment and international partnership) were particularly not well formulated. Progress has not been uniform across countries and regions (Africa in particular lags behind), and it was not clear whether the goals, as defined in the Millennium Declaration, applied to the world as a whole or to individual countries.

¹ 6 Board Members were present, see Annex 1

Possible Future Options

The Board felt that there must be agreement about the nature and scale of a global problem that new goals can help to solve, and that goals must be offered to the global public in attractive and results-oriented language that reflects a common ethical engagement. The Board's discussions focused on three options: a) '*Unfinished Business*', especially the likely persistence of absolute poverty through to the 2020s; b) '*New but related Business*', involving extensions of the current agenda, especially to recognise the importance of inequality, and to bring resilience to shocks into the equation (an MDG+ agenda); and c) '*New Business*', especially climate change and other environmental problems, but also other global public good problems (security, global food security etc.).

a) '*Unfinished Business*'

The Board pointed out that there are obvious unmet needs in poverty, health, education and gender equality, both in terms of trends and exposure to shocks. A targeted focus on these issues would be consistent with the results focus of current aid programmes, and would help to make the public case for continued aid, including the commitment to 0.7%. A future framework based on "unfinished business" could include support to growth for jobs and livelihoods, neglected in the early days of the MDGs, maintaining poverty eradication as the central objective to achieve a decent life for all. A "Floors to Well-being" approach could possibly be followed. On the other hand, a good part of the problem was to be found in middle income countries which did not need aid in the same way as LICs or fragile states. There was quite a debate about how large a part of the problem was to be found in LICs versus MICs, including relevant definitions of LICs and MICs for the future. It was also questioned whether 'more of the same' was sufficient to mobilise political and public opinion.

b) '*New but related Business*'

Support among civil society for the extension of the current MDGs into inequality and areas like secondary and further education was recognised. A focus on human dignity could be meaningfully captured by jobs (opportunities to earn a living coupled with an economy's ability to produce) and justice (a broad concept that would subsume democracy and governance). These concepts would serve to mobilise ethical engagement. Some of this was seen as politically difficult.

c) '*New Business*'

A majority of the Board identified environmental sustainability as an obvious candidate, climate in particular, along with other elements of 'good stewardship' (sustainability and concern for future generations) of natural resources – including soil, water, oceans, air quality, biodiversity etc. This could be approached using the concept of 'planetary boundaries', or management of natural stocks/global-regional commons, while keeping in mind the need to develop productive capabilities of states. It was considered important to avoid the risk of imposing standards that would not be appropriate for poor countries and populations.

Other issues and topics mentioned (not new) were international public goods and demographic pressures, global food problems, security and global governance institutions. In a number of cases, these were already the subject of international negotiations, some of which peculiarly painful and difficult.

Challenges for the EU

The Board felt that the EU was faced with a number of challenges – fault-lines, characteristic of the post-2015 discussion in other fora: i) Should the goals be universal or relevant mainly for a (shrinking) number of poor and fragile countries? ii) Should the goals be restricted to poverty reduction or extend more widely? and iii) Should the instruments be restricted to aid or include e.g. trade? The Board highlighted some political positioning that the EU should take into account:

- many poor countries and other members of the G77 would not sign up to new goals they felt applied only to them – India, China and Brazil were probably key players and somehow should be reached out to;
- the level of ambition should be tempered with realism, so that the process was not set up to fail;
- the possibility/desirability of a distinctive European voice on issues, reflecting European values and acquis;
- the need for good 'messaging', in words not acronyms such as 'a two pillar approach', 'stewardship of natural resources', 'jobs and justice', 'social inclusion' etc;
- finding a new rallying call for political mobilisation: some Members thought the environment fitted this particular bill others held the opposite view;
- taking into account Member State views, which in most cases were at the relatively modest (MDG+) end of the spectrum;
- thinking about the 'deal makers', including finance, and about the offer being made to developing countries, including reflecting on whether the post-2015 MDG agenda needs to be a post-ODA one.
- ensuring that goals set are clear set and measurable

Conclusions

The Board identified common ground on certain points. The Board agreed that the poverty focus of the original MDGs should not be lost and should remain key global and national goals post-2015. Recognizing the importance of human dignity and environmental sustainability the Board discussed a three pillar approach built on progressively more ambitious options, combining a focus on poverty eradication with universal goals. Introducing ambitious (progressive) options but being prepared to focus on a more limited (conservative) MDG+, was another seen as another possible strategic option. Global goals would need to be monitored, but perhaps without assigning individual country accountabilities. Appropriate language should be found to motivate a new generation of leaders in all countries and continents and mobilise people, getting ethical engagement, while at the same time making efforts to ensure inclusiveness and building alliances of drivers in the process such as with the BRICs. The Board Members indicated their wish to continue to contribute to the debate and their willingness to work further on these issues.

LIST OF SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS
MEETING ON MDGS & POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA
BRUSSELS, 13 SEPTEMBER 2012

Professor François Bourguignon
Paris School of Economics
France

Professor Ha-Joon Chang
University of Cambridge
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Professor Paul Collier
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Mr. Simon Maxwell
Senior Research Associate
Overseas Development Institute
United Kingdom

Professor Dr. Dirk Messner
Director
German Development Institute,
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Professor Lennart Wohlgemuth
Gothenburg University – School of Global Studies
Sweden

Commission Participants

CABINET

Irchad Razaaly Cabinet member

DEVCO

Françoise Moreau	Head of Unit DEVCO/A1
Nicoletta Merlo	Deputy Head of Unit DEVCO/A1
Kevin McCarthy	DEVCO/A1
Charlotte Bué	DEVCO/A1
Helge Arends	DEVCO/A1