Where is the World of Development Heading: What Will Come After the Millennium Development Goals?

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In 2000 the break-through Millennium summit took place in New York. It was the largest congregation of representatives of world countries up to that moment in history\(^1\). During this forum the Millennium declaration was adopted by all the participating country leaders, in presence of representatives of several prominent organisations and institutions such as OECD or the World Bank. The declaration consists of a commitment to reach eight specifically defined Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) until 2015, what has formed a significant milestone, to which mankind is slowly approaching.

Thirteen years after the historical summit another event took place – the UN Special Event on the Millennium Development Goals. Delegates of the countries of the world met on 25 September 2013 during the event hosted by the President of UN General Assembly John William Ashe from Antigua and Barbuda. However, the event was part of wider range of activities of diverse actors acting in development. Therefore we should speak about the proceeding with a knowledge of wider context. What preceded this event? What did the event bring and what could be derived from the published documents? Where will the development agenda move and what paradigm will prevail in the coming decades?

Before the event

The primary objective of the special event was not to evaluate the fulfilment of MDGs. There were other opportunities and tools to do so. The aim of this event was to formally open the discussion on the architecture of post-2015 development agenda and set the infrastructure for preparation of its concept. Several forums with diverse participating actors took place before, from political representatives at the UN, EU or OECD level, through non-governmental sector to citizens themselves. These forums have prepared background materials for the outcome of the special event adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2013 (later “outcome”)\(^2\).

Drafting of new conception of post-2015 development agenda has already been taking place for some years, at two main levels. On one side there is a process of preparation of sustainable development goals taking place, those goals suggested at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development Rio +20 in 2012. Starting from March 2013 this process is being led by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. The working group is open to various actors including civil society organisations. Although it should bring its report only at the next meeting of the General Assembly in September 2014, outcomes of the special event refer to it already.

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1 Of the member countries, only North Koreans were not present who refused to have their luggage checked by American Airlines staff during transfer in Frankfurt am Main and returned home.

Parallel with this process there is an intensive preparation taking place also under the supervision of UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon. He was tasked to establish a so called High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons in 2010 at the MDG summit. He asked its members to “prepare a bold yet practical” vision of the future after MDGs. Thanks to the request of member states the consultative body that supports the experts in the UN system is comprised of other relevant actors from the civil society, private sector or research. However it is criticised for being non-representative, as no representatives of labour unions or movements fighting poverty were invited.

After founding of the panel in 2012 a series of meetings and consultations took place. The panel had afterwards published a report under the name “New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development”. On its basis the report of the UN General Secretary A Life of Dignity for All has originated, which was presented at the special event in September 2013 and on which the outcome of the event adopted by the UN General Assembly was also based.

There was also the UN Non-governmental Liaison Service (UNGLS) – UN programme for relations with civil society organisations actively participating in the overall process. It has prepared the report “Advancing Regional Recommendations for the Post-2015 Development Agenda”. This comprehensive report originated in the communication with 120 regional civil society associations all around the world. It focuses on the views and recommendations from the local level. In addition to the UNGLS also the Post-2015 Development Planning Team is behind this initiative, which falls under the office of the UN General Secretary. The report was followed by a dialogue of more than thousand representatives of the non-governmental sector and member states, which took place on 22nd of September 2013, three days before the Millennium Development Goals special event. Strengthening cross-sector cooperation could be illustrated by the fact, that this meeting was opened by the President of the UN General Assembly John William Ashe, who had called in his opening speech for reflection on critical comments, suggestions and recommendations from the report of the non-governmental sector. The report with the recommendations of NGO sector was presented at the UN special event; however, the event outcome did not mention it explicitly.

Apart from that the UN had conducted the most comprehensive global survey in its existence. To find out what is the “World We Want”, UN conducted eleven thematic consultations with representatives of various participating sectors, and to get it to know in situ situation its delegations visited more than one hundred countries. The opinions of ordinary citizens on what the priorities in the development should be, are being collected through the survey named “MY World”, in which any person on is free to participate. The UN conducts the survey using available information and communication technologies and it collects feedback from people via their cell phones, the internet, as well as in written form. The research process is led by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network led by Jeffrey Sachs.

In the meantime other actors had been active as well, such as the European Commission, OECD or civil society organisations. The European Commission published the communication A decent Life for All: Ending poverty and giving the world a sustainable future in February 2013. It refers to Rio +20, to sustainable development goals, as well as to unachieved MDGs. It asks for integration of two parallel development paths at the UN field, those we were writing about above. At the Commission level this integration can be seen through the cooperation of two Directorates-General – DG for Development and Cooperation and DG for the Environment. The communication emphasises direct connection between sustainable quality of environment and efforts to eradicate poverty. It also urges for transition from aggregated quantitative indicators to qualitative...
ones, and emphasises economic aspects of the development. The elements, which it proposes, were included in the outcome of special event on MDGs in September 2013.

OECD as an actor, which held prominent position also during the drafting of goals proposed in 2000, is also preparing for new agenda and in the report of Development Assistance Committee (DAC) _The Post-2015 agenda: How can we contribute to the UN-led process?_ It specifies possible ways in which the organisation could contribute to the process led by the UN.

And finally, the third sector came up with its inputs as well. It is associated in the global campaign Beyond 2015. More than 900 development NGOs from all around the world are involved in that campaign. It calls for development infrastructure which would be a decent successor to MDGs. In the frame of the campaign the European Task Force Beyond 2015 was established comprised of European development organisations. Its goal is to put pressure on political representatives at local and European levels. In February 2013, under the leadership of CONCORD, it published a position paper to post-2015 development agenda named _Putting People and Planet First_. Position paper is, quite expectedly, more ambitious than political outputs mentioned above. Many of the issues included in the position paper are also included in the report from the UN special event, for example reference on the seventh principle from Rio 1992 declaration on “common but differentiated responsibility”.

In the upcoming time period all these inputs could be included into the process of preparation started by the UN special event. However, it will be influenced by the results of intergovernmental negotiations and interests of influential actors.

### What did the UN special event on MDGs bring and what results did the published outcome bring? Where will the new agenda shift after year 2015?

The outcome document from the event adopted by the UN General Assembly (_Outcome document of the special event to follow up efforts made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals_) can be divided to three areas – (a) appeal on acceleration of fulfilment of MDGs, (b) support of partnerships in the development based on fundamentals laid during the fulfilment of MDGs, as well as by other tools, and finally (c) setting the road map for Post-2015 Development Agenda.

a) Participating representatives have assessed “where we are”, and have affirmed their commitment to continue to fulfil the set goals. They have identified where there are problems and where we should accelerate, and they pointed out the challenges for the future. They said we should focus on those, who have fallen behind, take into consideration examples of successful strategies and approaches and to further strengthen them. They particularly emphasise the need to support approaches with cross-cutting or multiplying effects, especially gender equality and status of women and girls in the society, which could, according to the outcome document, significantly contribute to the development across all the goals.

b) In the part Global Partnership for Development the outcome document calls for cooperation of all sectors, including civil society and private sector and to a more consistent fulfilment of the goal to spend a certain percentage of gross national product on development cooperation – developed countries committed themselves to spend 0.7 percent of their GDP each year. However, the most recent report of MDG Gap Task Force says that in 2011, for the first time since 2000, the difference between commitment and real spending of members of DAC, actually rose and this negative trend should continue in the coming years.13 The Outcome also appeals to the private sector to adhere to responsible business practices. Civil society organisations issue warnings regarding the fact that the international community exerts itself 10  DAC at OECD, The Post-2015 agenda: How can we contribute to the UN-led process?; available at: http://search.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=DCD/DAC(2012)47/REV1&docLanguage=En
to invite businesses into partnerships. The trend to include private sector into the development was explicitly articulated also during the high level forum of aid effectiveness in Busan, which took place in 2011. It can be related to the decreasing country resources budgeted for development cooperation.

c) In the last part of the outcome document the participants indicated a possible architecture of the new development agenda and defined a road map for achieving it. Countries have committed themselves to “craft a strong post-2015 development agenda, that will build on the foundations laid by the Millennium Development Goals, complete the unfinished business and respond to new challenges”. In the new agenda we should accentuate the eradication of poverty while advocating for sustainable development comprised of its three main intertwined components – economic, social and environmental. In particular, the outcome points out the need to engage a wide variety of stakeholders. The improvement, in comparison to the current agenda, could be the “customization” of development goals for individual countries with their country specifics at once with inclusion of implementation and the monitoring of situation also in developed, not only in developing countries – it is so called universality of the proposed agenda. This universality of development goals is related to interconnection of “ordinary” development development, which in order to be achieved, needs to be implemented in all countries of the world.

This area may be considered the most important outcome of the event, because it is indicative of how the approach to development will look like in the coming decades. On one side it can be interpreted as an effort to retain the foundations of original goals and an intent to further build on quantitative indicators, on the other hand the new agenda aims to change this rigorous exactness or even generalisation by softening it, from global perspective to local country-based goals, which would be in congruence with what the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons called a “data revolution” in its report A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development. It should be a shift from aggregated indicators which are collected on a too general scale, which can cause them to “leave out”, for example, the most marginalised social groups, and thus it could be more difficult to identify tools tailor-made for the problems. If the recommendations of the high-level panel would be projected into the new development agenda, there would be certain global minimal standards defined, and several other country-specific indicators would be added. On one side these new specific goals could bring positive changes, on the other hand they would require high quality analysis to both define them and to later monitor their implementation.

An example of a new goal with a sample non-aggregated indicator

Goal: 1. Eradicate poverty

1a. To reduce to zero the number of people living from less than 1.25 dollar per day and to reduce the number of people living below country poverty level in 2015 by x%

We should underline the fact that the seventh principle of Rio declaration from 1992 on “Common but differentiated responsibility” for the sustainable development was included in the outcome, the principle which was for a long time being refused by the most relevant developed countries. Even this time they were not really keen to include it into the outcome, however it was included thanks to joint efforts of the Group 77 and China. Yet, it does not mean that the risk is any lower of future dispute on the issue of sustainable development and how countries of the global North contribute to its implementation.

17 Group 77 is the largest formal intergovernmental group of less developed countries in the UN which was established in 1964, and currently it has 133 members; available at: http://www.g77.org/
Expected or possible elements of new development agenda

- It should be built on the Millennium Development Goals
- Move from global to local country targeted goals, connected to the move away from aggregated indicators to unique indicators for specific countries, hand in hand with improvement of data collection and interpretation of data
- Introduction of minimal global standards
- The central imperative should be the struggle against poverty, together with enforcement of sustainable development (currently these two agendas still go parallel to each other within the development system, but they should be combined)
- The new agenda should be universal – it should be applied to the developed countries, which would also have internal obligations, not only external
- Representatives of civil society and private sector should be involved in the process of preparation and later implementation to a higher extent than was the case in the past

Preparation process

The process of preparing the new agenda will be in the coming year supported by the series of events of UN General Assembly named “The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage” under the leadership of its president. There will be three meetings organised at the highest level, with the participants looking at the post-2015 agenda from various perspectives, from the perspective of women, youth, civil society, in the context of human rights or in relation to cooperation along the South-South axis as well as on inclusion of ICT into the new development. The UN will also address other issues in consequent discussions.18

Official intergovernmental negotiations will start at the beginning of 69th UN General Assembly in September 2014, one year before the summit in 2015, at which finalised development agenda post-2015 should be adopted. Among the challenges before final adoption we could mention the demanding task to synchronise variety of inputs from the UN (the above mentioned processes). Member countries have asked Ban Ki-moon to do so – his administration should prepare a synthesising report until the end of 2014. Another challenge will be synchronising all the different interests and conceptions of individual countries.

A chance for the civil society

The processes which take place, the actors who are involved into the preparation process, as well as the previous trend of emphasising cooperation between the civil society and the representatives of member countries (with the metaphorical reference to the Agenda 21), give a promise that opinions of the civil society and the needs of citizens at the local level will get a wider opportunity to be discussed and fulfilled. This is also indicated by the formulation used in the outcome of the special event (where the text reads: “In arriving at the inclusive and people-centred post-2015 development agenda, we look forward to a transparent intergovernmental process that will include inputs from all stakeholders, including civil society, scientific and knowledge institutions, parliaments, local authorities and the private sector.”19) together with the initiated activities during which not only the actors active in the development could express their opinion, but also the wider society.

Challenges and opened questions

In conclusion we could say that the UN special event on MDGs formally opened the path to the new development agenda, agenda which will influence the view of development cooperation and development per se, for next few decades. At the same time we should note that from the road map a few open questions and challenges arise:

1. How the two currently somewhat autonomous processes – the process related primarily to the development agenda post-2015, and the process related to sustainable development – will be combined into one single agenda?

2. In what way will the new agenda identify goals to be fulfilled in each individual country in such a way that they are feasible on one hand, and ambitious enough on the other hand? How will we be able to compare the results in a certain global reference framework?

3. How will the new agenda assure the existence of sufficient institutional structures and capacities to identify indicators and to perform their later independent monitoring?

4. How to include effectiveness among the new agenda indicators, which could be a more accurate measure of development cooperation and impact on human lives and thus increase the legitimacy of spent resources?

5. How to effectively mobilise all the relevant actors in a way they would be responsible for the results of actions they would partake in? What will be their roles in the new agenda, what responsibilities will they hold and how will it be possible to monitor and evaluate them?

6. How to avoid the risks arising from wider engagement of the private sector in development, risks of what Klaus Schilder from the network of development organisations CIDSE called a “Partnership Euphoria”? It brings considerable risks and possible side effects, for example, too excessive inclination to financial needs of development and shift away from other, qualitative criteria.

7. How to assure that principle of universality, meaning involvement of developed countries into the responsibility for sustainable development, would be implemented into practice and how to set its criteria and perform its monitoring?

8. How to persuade the dominant developed countries to truly adopt the seventh principle of the Rio declaration in the new agenda, and in doing so to accept their higher share of responsibility in the agenda of sustainable development?

20 Presentation by Klaus Schilder, who at the meeting of UN Non-governmental Liaison Service on 22.9.2013 represented organisation Misereor and the NGO network CIDSE; available at: http://www.un-ngls.org/spip.php?article4350