

## CONCORD's views on EU support to sustainable development worldwide

July 2019

In 2017, the European Union and its Member States adopted a shared vision and framework for action to align the Union's development policy with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the [European Consensus on Development](#). Two years later, they published their first '[Joint Synthesis Report](#)' (JSR) to monitor the implementation and impact of their actions. While CONCORD acknowledges it is too early to demonstrate real progress on the ground, it would like to share its own reflections on the progress made and put forward recommendations for future policy, programming and reporting in terms of EU commitments and obligations in external action and international cooperation to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### **BREAKING SILOS**

The SDGs and targets are indivisible and interlinked whereby progress on one goal can contribute to another or, in contrast, could undermine efforts in another. The JSR recognises the value of an integrated approach but CONCORD believes this could be significantly strengthened in order to make a real difference to people's lives and secure a future for people and the planet. This means more cross-unit collaboration within DEVCO and the EEAS and a focus on synergies and co-benefits.

- In dialogue with partner countries, the EU and its Member States should identify opportunities for synergies to maximise positive impacts.
- This requires viewing SDGs as interlinked and indivisible, and not as 17 separate objectives complemented by distinct principles such as leaving no one behind or respecting planetary boundaries. An integrated approach is required in preparatory analysis, programming, implementation, monitoring and reporting.

### **DEMOCRATIC OWNERSHIP**

People should be actively involved in the elaboration of their country's or region's sustainable development strategy. And when such strategies have been developed, other actors operating in that country, such as donors or investors, should align their efforts with these democratically owned sustainable development strategies, something the JSR could be much more explicit about.

- The EU and its Member States should align their geographic development programmes - developed through joint analysis and programming, with the sustainable development strategies of partner countries.
- Official Development Assistance used to leverage private investments under the European Fund for Sustainable Development should meet conditions of transparency, accountability, ownership, alignment with national or subnational sustainable development priorities and debt sustainability risk.

### **LEAVING NO-ONE BEHIND – TACKLING INEQUALITIES**

Although the JSR states that inequality has increased within many countries, the steps proposed to ensure no-one is left behind are limited in scope and coverage. For example, the report focuses on equality between men and women, disability and migration and gives little attention to other factors such as income, ethnicity, age, religion or beliefs, sexual orientation and gender identity. The increasing use of Public Private Partnerships co-financed with ODA budgets may actually contribute to greater inequality leaving the most marginalised people and places without access to public services such as water, health and education. A focus on economic growth in GDP terms alone will not benefit those left behind but instead the focus should be on wellbeing for all.

- Tackling inequalities should be a top priority for the new Commission guided by an EU Action Plan to Fight Inequalities.
- The EU and Member States should tackle the systemic nature of inequality in our current system, by a paradigm shift towards an economy that benefits all people and planet. This means going beyond inclusive growth to a post-growth economy. Such a post-growth economy should be



circular, based on a decarbonised Europe, and measured by wellbeing of people and planet instead of GDP.

- The EU should invest in collecting disaggregated data (by gender, age, disability, rural-urban split, minority status, social status and income quintile) and in supporting partner countries to do likewise to facilitate reaching out to those furthest behind.

### **ENSURING GENDER EQUALITY**

The JSR recalls that gender equality is enshrined in the EU political and legal framework. CONCORD finds the financial efforts under the Spotlight Initiative to fight violence against women and girls very positive and equally the efforts to promote women's roles in peacebuilding and humanitarian responses. However, CONCORD is concerned that the JSR implies that empowerment of women is a means to enhance business productivity and economic growth. Realising women's rights must be an objective in its own right and not be instrumentalised, as also recognised in the 2018 EU Women Peace and Security Strategy. The JSR lacks references to women's participation in decision making and democratic accountability and there are also no references to the need to provide support to local women's groups and movements which play a crucial role in driving change from within countries.

- More attention should be paid to evaluating the impact of the EU's policies and funding on gender equality, in addition to the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP).
- Gender should be better included in political dialogue and programming beyond social sectors, in particular in trade, infrastructure and energy negotiations and programmes.
- In order to make sure that targeted action gets the needed resources, 20% of the EU's development funding should have gender equality as a principal objective (gender marker 2), in addition to the 85% target for funding having gender equality as a significant or principal objective (G1 or G2) stated in the EU GAP.
- The EU and its Member States should dedicate more funding to support local women's rights organisations in developing countries.

### **RESPECTING PLANETARY BOUNDARIES**

Multiple ecological crises – climate change, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation – are threatening the very foundations of sustainable development. While we welcome steps the EU and its Member States are taking, much more needs to be done. The impacts of climate change are very visible and already harming the lives and opportunities of vulnerable people. In terms of climate, the JSR focuses on climate finance to support mitigation and adaptation but the ambition should be higher. The EU must also recognise its responsibility to strive to keep global warming below 1.5°C, set a target for zero net emissions by 2040 and halt fossil fuel subsidies. There is no time to waste. In addition climate and environment must be mainstreamed through international development cooperation programmes and external action to ensure that no public finance is supporting further environmental damage. Additionally, a deep change in the EU's industrial and economic model is needed, i.e. the way we produce and consume, including in the field of agriculture.

- The EU should scale up climate action and financial support to developing countries. In the next MFF, a 50% target for actions relevant to climate and environment would deliver co-benefits across a wide range of sectors.
- The environment and climate change must be mainstreamed through all the EU's development cooperation activities, whilst resilience building and bridging the humanitarian-development nexus should be taken into account in all humanitarian and development programmes. The effectiveness of mainstreaming efforts should be monitored and evaluated.
- The EU and its Member States should support diversified, ecologically and socially sustainable food systems benefiting smallholders, in particular those based on agroecology.

### **CIVIL SOCIETY**

Civil society is a main player to ensure principles of effective development such as a human rights-based approach, the principle of Leaving No One Behind and addressing the multiple dimensions of poverty and inequality. Promotion of civic democratic space and an enabling environment for civil society is crucial to achieve the SDGs. CONCORD acknowledges the promotion of CSO participation in EU and Member States'



development cooperation over recent years. Nevertheless, the recognition of civil society's diverse roles – as stated in the 2012 EC Communication – has not always been backed coherently, and is surprisingly weak throughout the JSR. Where civil society is mentioned, it often appears to be European civil society, rather than local civil society in partner countries.

- Strengthen a structured dialogue with a diverse range of CSOs and mechanisms for inclusion and genuine participation of civil society, supported by the EU Country Roadmaps process.
- Adapt funding modalities to the context and diversity of civil society, including small CSOs and CSOs representing specific groups that are often overlooked by funders (women and youth organisations, LGBTI, minorities, indigenous peoples, etc.).
- Secure long-term funding for civil society and support partnerships, networking, capacity building and peer-learning, applying the Istanbul Principles and similar codes in a spirit of shared responsibilities, mutual trust and accountability.

### **PRIVATE SECTOR**

Aid, trade and investment can all make a significant positive contribution to sustainable development in developing countries. The line between the three, however, can easily get blurred, making it unclear whether the objective is to subsidise European companies and to expand their market access or to support local economic actors in developing countries, including cooperatives and workers in the informal sector. In this context, greater attention should be given to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and social enterprises in local and regional value chains and trade.

- The EU should measure the success of private sector instruments in terms of development impact and not by quantity of leveraged private investments.
- The EU should introduce legal obligations for European businesses in all sectors to respect human rights and gender equality through mandatory human rights due diligence, with effective mechanisms for access to justice and remedy for victims. This should be accompanied by an EU Action Plan on responsible business conduct.
- The EU should integrate environmental, social and governance factors in policy and regulatory frameworks on public and private finance.

### **FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT**

Years after adopting the 2030 Agenda, the EU and its Member States are no closer to meeting the collective target of 0.7% ODA as gross national income (GNI). In 2017, together they remained the biggest development donor worldwide. [CONCORD's 2018 AidWatch report](#) shows that the level of ODA decreased for the first time in six years. The lack of transparency around ODA spent and widespread use of official and unofficial 'tying' require an honest reflection and assurance that ODA should respect development effectiveness principles, focus on poverty reduction, achieving the SDGs and ensuring no-one is left behind. The JSR insufficiently reports on the implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) commitments. Apart from budget support, the JSR focuses narrowly on blending public and private investments and aid for trade, and remains strangely silent on grants.

- The EU and its Member States should realise the commitments to spend 0.7% of GNI on ODA, which some Member States have successfully enshrined in law, and to comply with the targets for LDCs, including giving ODA amounting to 0,15% and 0,20% of GNI.
- ODA should be spent in line with development effectiveness principles, i.e. transparent, untied and targeted to where it is most needed, which applies to all forms of development cooperation.
- The EU should take a more holistic look at the AAAA, and strengthen its focus on the democratic global governance of tax and of debt management, on country-by-country reporting and more binding rules and regulations on sustainable business practices as these aspects are key to reducing financial irresponsibility, inequalities, human rights abuses and to help ensure no one is left behind.

### **POLICY COHERENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Despite the acknowledgement that non-development policies have a major collective impact on sustainable development in partner countries, the JSR hardly looks at the impact of EU policies such as trade, agriculture, migration, finance, tax and corporate accountability on sustainable development in partner

countries, or the effectiveness of the mechanisms that should prevent and mitigate negative impact. Yet the [external evaluation of the EU's Policy Coherence for Development policy \(2009-2016\)](#) and [various CONCORD reports](#) indicate there is still a lot of room for improvement. More attention should be paid to the trade-offs between the EU's economic interests on the one hand, and the objectives of halting climate change and resource depletion, reducing inequalities, promoting human rights and sustainable development on the other, in Europe and in partner countries.

- The EU and its Member States should report on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development measures and impact;
- The EU should develop a strategy for Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development at all levels across all sectors.

## **MIGRATION**

Rather than seeing migration as a negative challenge to be handled, the SDGs promote a positive and holistic approach to migration. CONCORD regrets that the JSR has no reference to the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), as especially the GCM provides a more balanced and comprehensive list of objectives for countries to approach migration. The need to respect human rights, to tackle urgent issues such as safe and regular pathways, the contribution of migrants to development and the fight against trafficking in human beings and labour exploitation are all better addressed by a functioning international migration governance regime. The JSR claims that migration policies have helped to promote stability in fragile states, which is questionable in several African countries; studies and researches have criticised the EU for the lack of long-term perspective. CONCORD has witnessed the focus of EU funding for migration and border management. CONCORD stresses the importance of monitoring and evaluating the results of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa to ensure that the EU's and Member States' aid budget is spent in line with the SDGs, on the most vulnerable in target countries.

- The EU and its Member States should focus the funding allocated for 'migration and development' on increasing human security and facilitating the positive effects of migration.
- The EU should monitor and evaluate the outcomes of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa to assess how allocations correspond to sustainable development needs of the region.
- The EU and its Member States should promote initiatives expanding safe and regular pathways (such as humanitarian visas, resettlement programs, more labour mobility options across all skills levels), and implement via its external action the Global Compact on Refugees and Global Compact for Safe Orderly and Regular Migration.

## **GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION**

Citizens' active and informed engagement - within and outside the European Union - towards sustainable development, equity and human rights is key to the achievement of 2030 Agenda. CONCORD thus regrets the constant lack of attention given to actions directed at inclusive and quality education within the EU, including in the JSR.

- The EU should acknowledge the universality of the 2030 Agenda and focus both on partner countries and the European public to achieve the SDGs through the establishment of a common strategy and instrument fostering Global Citizenship Education.

## **MONITORING AND COLLECTING EVIDENCE**

CONCORD encourages the EU to continue monitoring and reporting on its implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This requires a holistic approach going well beyond development cooperation, to overcome the siloed approach and the artificial internal-external divide. CONCORD reiterates its call for an overarching Sustainable Europe 2030 Strategy against which to report on progress, a call echoed repeatedly by [Member States](#) and the [European Parliament](#). Reporting of EU action should also become more self-critical and include integrated analysis of progress, challenges, opportunities and incoherencies to be able to guide the EU's action in the future, instead of continuing business as usual. References to evaluation reports and other evidence should be provided to justify claims of positive contributions of projects and programmes. CONCORD welcomes the assessment and recommendations by the [European Court of Auditors](#) to improve EU sustainability reporting.

