

Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on the Proposal for a new European Consensus on Development — Our World, our Dignity, our Future

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Introduction

1. recognises that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations in September 2015, provides a new and ambitious framework of commitments, calling on all countries to strive for change in order to move towards inclusive and sustainable development strategies on a national and international scale;
2. understands that the 2030 Agenda has been conceived from the outset as universal, meaning it commits every single country, including the EU and its Member States, to review their domestic policies and international commitments to bring them into line with the objectives and goals of the 2030 Agenda; warns, however, that this task must be carried out not only at national level, but also with respect to the policies and competences falling to the regional and local governments of the EU;
3. emphasises that the EU and its Member States must play a crucial role in developing and implementing Agenda 2030 and to this end welcomes the progress made by the Communication on the *Next steps for a sustainable European future: European actions for sustainability* and the *Global Strategy on the EU's Foreign and Security Policy*;
4. considers that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development should be seen as a multi-level and multi-stakeholder agenda that lays obligations upon all public authorities at the various levels (local, regional, national and international), together with other social actors beyond governments; at the same time points out that many of the 2030 Agenda's objectives and goals directly impinge upon areas of work and competences that belong to subnational authorities. If they are to be met, therefore, the full involvement of the regions and local authorities in transposing the SDGs and in framing the policies to achieve them needs to be promoted;
5. agrees with the Commission on the need to define a new consensus on development, revising and updating the 2005 agreement, in order to tackle the challenges posed by the 2030 Agenda and the changes that have taken place on the international scene and in the development cooperation system;
6. agrees with the Commission that the best way to carry the 2030 Development Agenda forward is to enhance coordination of cooperation policies between the EU and its Member States; emphasises, however, that due to the comprehensive nature of the 2030 Agenda and the interconnections between its objectives, progress must also be on made with ensuring that EU and Member State policies are consistent;

Global challenges and the 2030 Agenda

7. notes that accelerating globalisation has produced a more integrated and complex world, with changes in the nature and distribution of power at international level, greater variety in the developing world, a redistribution of world poverty, with widening inequalities within countries, and widening space for international public goods; considers the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda to mark the clear intention to respond to the transformations mentioned above and to the challenges raised by promoting development in the following decades;

8. takes on board the universal nature of the 2030 Agenda, which obliges all countries and societies to make a cooperative effort to align their policies with the objectives set out in the Agenda; draws attention, nevertheless, to the need for this effort to be made at all levels of public intervention, including regional and local authorities;

9. confirms that the intentions that underpin the SDGs entail going beyond the working bounds of official development assistance (ODA); considers that although ODA will continue to be crucial as a source of funding for the poorest countries and as a catalyst for change in other categories of country, the new Agenda necessarily involves a broader view including other flows and instruments that lie outside ODA as such;

10. considers that the need to mobilise resources and capacities beyond aid requires working more strategically with the different existing schemes and methods for cooperation at international level; while north-south cooperation will continue to play a major role in the future, it must be coordinated more closely with south-south or triangular forms of cooperation; similarly, draws attention to the active role that decentralised cooperation can have in the new Agenda by fostering exchange of experiences between substate actors in their particular areas of competences; lastly, considers that EU and Member State cooperation will have to be stepped up with the various mechanisms for regional and multilateral cooperation, in keeping with the multi-level approach of which the 2030 Agenda forms part;

11. considers that, due to its ambition and comprehensive character, the 2030 agenda requires the active support of more, and more varied, actors, including local and regional authorities, as well as civil society organisations, businesses, foundations, universities and other study centres among others, in order to mobilise and harness the added value that each of them can offer in accordance with their experience and field of work;

The EU response

12. supports the proposal for the EU and its Member States to be firmly and actively committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda. To this end, consistent mainstreaming of the SDGs across all the public policies that are applied within the EU at Union, national, regional and local levels should be promoted; and stresses the need to progressively align the policies and incentives with which actors work with the agreed aims of the Agenda;

13. agrees that the EU's external action has a key role to play in making the SDGs a reality and therefore welcomes the progress made in this task by means of the priorities defined in the Treaty on European Union (TEU — Article 21(2)) and in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU — Article 208); it also supports the Commission's intention to ensure that the new Consensus on Development helps to put the European Union's external action priorities, as defined in the Global Strategy on the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, into practice;

14. supports the Commission's aim of stepping up coordination between development policy and other EU policies of international scope, including humanitarian aid, trade, regional integration, health, education, energy, fisheries, agriculture, the environment, science and technology, migration and asylum, and the European Neighbourhood Policy; emphasises however that improving the level of policy coordination is not enough. Consistency between these policies and the internationally-agreed development objectives also needs to be increased;

15. agrees with the Commission that if it is to be effective, the response must be collective and subject to criteria that are shared by the European Union; points out, however, that links must be forged not only between the EU and the Member States, but also between the Member States and the regional and local authorities, who hold a part of the competences need to achieve the SDGs;

16. backs the Commission's aim of grounding EU and Member State development cooperation on a rights-based approach, making people active players in development efforts as well as their main focus; considers, moreover, that this approach is in keeping with the SDGs and with the guiding principle of the 2030 Agenda to leave no-one behind, seeking to ensure that progress in development reaches the most fragile and vulnerable sectors of society;

17. agrees with the Commission in emphasising that gender equality is a key element in this rights-based approach and must underpin all the EU's and the Member States' development cooperation work as well as decentralised cooperation, which entails not only taking steps against existing inequalities in this area, but also promoting women's rights, empowerment and access to education at all levels;

Our common priorities

18. considers that one of the central aims of EU and Member State development policy is to support countries in combating poverty, including improvements in the provision and quality of basic social services for all, as laid down in the 2030 Agenda; draws attention, nevertheless, to the fact that many of these services are provided by decentralised administrations, as a result of which support for local and regional administrations in implementing the SDGs is crucial;

19. backs the 2030 Agenda's proposal to build inclusive societies by tackling inequality and promoting social cohesion; at the same time, considers that decentralised administration plays a key role in identifying and remedying the processes of social exclusion and marginalisation that underlie inequalities;

20. points to the importance of building peaceful, well-governed societies, eradicating insecurity and violence and reinforcing effective and transparent institutions; draws attention to the need for this process to be built up from the territorial base closest to citizens, supporting improvements to local and regional institutions, to help put tools firmly in place for people who are committed to achieving the targets of the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals to take part and exercise democratic control; education for global citizenship must therefore become an essential dimension of the policies and strategies of the various stakeholders and actors, whether governmental or non-governmental, that form part of the international system of development cooperation;

21. agrees with the aim of the 2030 Agenda to bring about the conditions for development processes to be environmentally sustainable by enhancing the management of natural resources and protection of the most fragile ecosystems; once again, local and regional authorities are key to pushing ahead with these policies, striving to balance sustainability with the economic and social progress of affected communities; this aim is particularly relevant to SDG 11, which states the need to 'make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable';

22. believes it is important to guide countries towards the path of inclusive and sustainable growth that can create decent jobs, as argued by the 2030 Agenda; highlights the role that regional and local authorities can play in promoting these processes, creating a resilient economy on clearly defined territorial foundations by means of alliances between actors, including local small and medium-sized enterprises;

23. in brief, draws attention to the importance in the partner countries of decentralised public administration in putting the 2030 Agenda into practice; emphasises the role that decentralised cooperation can play in transferring know-how and skills between these actors; and argues that the new Consensus on Development should acknowledge and foster the potential of this type of cooperation;

Partnership: the European Union as a driver for implementing the 2030 Agenda

24. recognises that while each country must be responsible for its own development, the SDGs can only be achieved by building a Global Partnership bringing in all countries, multilateral institutions and other social actors, working together to build inclusive and sustainable development strategies as called for by the 2030 Agenda; at the same time, states once again that regional and local authorities must be part of this cooperative effort, bringing their own skills and resources to bear on this area of work;

25. draws particular attention to the crucial role that decentralised cooperation can play in forming multi-stakeholder partnerships geared to promoting change in developing countries as indicated in the 2030 Agenda; the contribution made by this type of cooperation and its complementarity with other types should be acknowledged in the New Consensus on Development;

26. emphasises that the European Union and its Member States should facilitate the processes of coordination, division of tasks and coherence between actors within such a Global Partnership; considers that this objective will be more easily achieved if the European Union and its Member States step up joint programming in the area of development cooperation, based on shared visions, negotiated between the partner countries; draw attention, however, to the need for regional and local authorities to take part in this process of dialogue and consultation;

27. considers similarly that this coordination effort must, in operational terms, take the form of joint indicative programmes in the partner countries; also underlines the importance of working, wherever possible, through joint actions at national, regional or international level, in order to increase the collective impact of European and Member State action; points out, in addition, that the actors of decentralised cooperation must also be involved in the processes of framing and implementing these programmes, as well as in monitoring and evaluating them;

28. urges that, in the partner countries, wherever possible use be made of form of cooperation, such as direct budget support or EU Trust Funds, that make coordination between actors easier and facilitate more integrated and flexible use of resources in the partner countries;

29. shares the Commission's views on the importance of large-scale mobilisation of public and private and domestic and international resources to help implement the aims of the 2030 Agenda, as set out in the Accra Agenda for Action; considers that, to this end, public resources should be deployed with the aim of mobilising and leveraging private resources to serve development, by making use of innovative financial instruments and different types of blending (combining donations and loans); warns, nevertheless, of the need to guarantee sufficiently that the resources mobilised: (i) have a clear development purpose; (ii) match the priorities of the partner country; (iii) bring clear additionality compared to public funds; and (iv) are subject to effective control mechanisms regarding their use/destination and to progressive checks on the progress towards the development objectives set;

30. underlines the importance of the EU and Member State development cooperation reaching out to, mobilising and drawing in as many actors as possible in support of the SDGs, including local and regional authorities, the private sector, civil society and academia among others, each of them contributing its own capacities, know-how and resources; points out that decentralised cooperation is a particularly apt form of cooperation for promoting and coordinating such territorial based multi-stakeholder partnerships; urges the Commission and the Member States to support local and regional public administrations, so that they are able to mainstream the SDGs into their policies; and stresses that decentralised cooperation provides a favourable environment for creating spaces for global citizenship so as to encourage citizens to reflect upon the sustainable development goals, participate in public policies to achieve these goals, and monitor the application of the 2030 Agenda;

31. points to the importance of building technical and institutional capacities in the partner countries so they can effect a shift to inclusive and sustainable development strategies, as called for by the 2030 Agenda; draws attention to the need for this process to extend to decentralised administration in the partner countries;

32. emphasises that EU and Member State development cooperation must distribute its resources in keeping with clear and transparent rules, taking account of the needs, structural gaps and capacity to mobilise alternative resources of the partner countries; at the same time, argues that resources and activities must be applied in compliance with the principle of leaving no-one behind;

33. points out, in this regard, that the lowest-income countries and in particular the least developed countries (LDCs), together with fragile and post-conflict states, must be the prime focus of the most favourable components of international aid from the EU and its Member States;

34. warns, nevertheless, that broad swathes of middle income countries are affected by serious structural shortcomings, with highly varied internal situations, fragile institutions and fractured societies; development cooperation, including financial cooperation, can be use in helping these countries to overcome their shortcomings and promote a process of sustained development that also enhances their capacity to play an active part in implementing the 2030 Agenda;

35. is of the view that ordered migration can act as lever for progress in both the countries of origin and of destination, as well as being of benefit to migrants themselves; considers that the ordered management of migration must be one of the aims of development action, seeking to provide appropriate regulatory responses and support measures to protect migrants' human rights along their migratory route and in the destination country, and also offering them opportunities in their countries of origin, with the aim of slackening the pressure of uncontrolled migration flows;

36. notes that the instruments available to development cooperation extend beyond the specific instrument of international aid, including means that, while they cannot be quantified in the same way as ODA, can potentially generate development opportunities; considers that EU and Member State development cooperation must make active use of this set

of instruments and adapt the sources and instruments used to the specific conditions of each of the partner countries, including the middle income ones;

37. supports the Commission's proposal to put in place an ambitious External Investment Plan with a view to mobilising private investment, increasing technical assistance so local authorities and businesses can frame projects effectively, and generating a business-friendly environment, with due consideration of local and regional authorities' territorial development priorities; considers that the Plan must be aligned with the objectives defined in the 2030 Agenda and must facilitate the participation of local and regional authorities to ensure proper implementation;

38. agrees with the Commission on the importance of supporting regional integration schemes to boost development processes in the countries involved and enhance the provision of regional public goods, in order to better implement the 2030 Agenda; and takes note of the revision of the Neighbourhood Policy in keeping with the new priorities flowing from the 2030 Agenda; at the same time stresses the need, as part of this policy, to strengthen cooperation between regions by means of appropriate support measures;

Enhancing the impact of the European Union

39. underlines the need to continue efforts to enhance the effectiveness of development cooperation, applying the agreements reached at the Rome, Paris, Accra and Busan summits; considers, at the same time, that it is important to support institutional capacity-building in the partner countries and, inter alia, to encourage partner countries to also include local and regional authorities' top priorities in their national planning documents, so that cooperation work bears fruit and responds to the needs of various areas and their inhabitants;

40. notes that development cooperation cannot by itself fund the transformations called for by the 2030 Agenda; emphasises, therefore, the need for the EU and the Member States to use cooperation as a lever for additional resources from other sources and as a catalyst to change incentives and promote positive change in the developing countries;

41. reiterates that if the countries of the EU wish to constitute a credible benchmark on the international scene they must fulfil their commitments; consequently considers that the countries should set themselves the target of achieving the EU's objectives with regard to the international agenda on development funding; and also advocates that they should meet the commitment contained in the United National Framework Convention on Climate Change, including agreements on environmental funding;

42. confirms the value of adjusting cooperation to the range of instruments and steps which, above and beyond aid, are coming into play in the international system supporting development processes; to this end, agrees with the value of following up on the OECD's work to provide development financing with new means of measurement, including the development of the concept of Total Official Support for Sustainable Development;

43. recognises that reliable technical solutions do not exist for many of the problems mentioned by the 2030 Agenda, and that alternatives based on creativity, knowledge promotion and technological and social innovation need to be sought; considers that in this area, decentralised cooperation can play an important role, transferring the experience gained at the local and regional levels;

44. notes that the 2030 Agenda cannot be put into practice unless policy coherence is improved substantially, taking account of the effect that all public policies have on development objectives; emphasises, moreover, that progress in the area of coherence must be made both in areas of (horizontal) public action and between levels of government (local, regional, national and EU) by means of a 'whole-of-government' approach to public policies and programmes in the short, medium and long term;

45. draws attention to the need for all EU cooperation actors to join in a drive for transparency, which should cover the resources mobilised by each of them; considers that the public authorities (EU, national, regional and local) must be actively involved in this drive as a means of improving accountability and the quality of interventions;

46. considers that territorially-based transformative action, involving local actors and with the support of decentralised cooperation, can be the best way of promoting a dense yet widespread process of transition towards inclusive and sustainable development models;

47. with regard to the above, the Committee of the Regions once again offers to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to exchange of know-how and experience with other public powers and with the counterpart authorities in the developing countries by means of the information and discussion platform (portal) for local and regional authorities for development, the biennial dialogue on decentralised cooperation (known as the 'Assises') and the international forums provided by the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) and the annual Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP); The Committee of the Regions would like to boost and coordinate decentralised cooperation between local and regional authorities in the European Union and those of neighbouring countries as part of specific initiatives, such as the Nicosia Initiative for Libya;

48. believes it is important to develop a sound communication policy for sustainable development, as this would foster a more informed understanding both of the challenges faced and of the policies that need to be implemented, and would result in more conscious and active support from the general public, including with regard to development cooperation and committing to the 2030 Agenda as an investment for the future; the relevance of the development cooperation goals should also be communicated to European citizens, thus raising awareness about the mutual benefits of this policy, such as the fact that it creates areas of regional stability; finally, the activities of the various stakeholders involved in the process should be made visible, including local and regional authorities and particularly the ORs, which have for years been developing successful policies for cooperating with their neighbouring countries;

Following-up on our commitments

49. advocates all cooperation actors progressively adjusting their reporting systems and follow-up indicators to the content of the 2030 Agenda; also advocates producing joint summary progress reports on the 2030 Agenda that can be submitted to the UN High Level Political Forum; and calls for regional and local authorities to be actively involved in preparing these reports on the steps taken in areas falling within their remit and by means of decentralised cooperation;

50. agrees on the need to reinforce statistical systems in order to follow up on the 2030 Agenda; draws attention to the need for this reinforcement to apply also to the production of regional and local information, in order to ensure that progress is made in all sectors and territories.

Brussels, 8 February 2017.

*The President
of the European Committee of the Regions*
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