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Development and climate: towards a convergent approach

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On 2 August this year, after seven months of negotiations, the 193 Member States of the United Nations reached an agreement on the “Post-2015 Development Agenda”. This agenda will be formally adopted by the heads of state and government during a high-level UN summit on 25 September in New York. The text of the agreement, entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, sets out the

major areas that will structure international cooperation and national sustainable development policies over the next 15 years, with the list of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their 169 targets as its cornerstone.

Key aspects of the text

The [final text](#) is the outcome of a number of international compromises; it (inevitably) presents the shortcomings of this type of negotiation: watered-down commitments according to some people, and too many targets that are highly heterogeneous and unequal in importance, according to others. The agreement has not yet produced discussions on all the problems of compatibility between the different goals.

The agreement also has some unquestionable virtues. It is a major step forward in relation to the United Nations Millennium Declaration, which established the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000.

The principles underlying the agreement will significantly alter the way in which we have approached development policy so far. First, the agreement is universal: all countries must work towards its implementation, according to their capacity and their level of development. “Transforming our world” is not a development agenda defined by the North for the South, but rather a sustainable development agenda defined by and for the North and the South. It has been defined and can only be implemented by a coalition of development and environment stakeholders (North, South, public, private, NGOs, research centres). North-South solidarity is still important, but no longer central: it is just one component of a wide range of different partnerships.

Second, the agenda is indivisible: the SDGs and their targets are interlinked and integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development. This integration is reflected in the title of the agreement itself: while some stakeholders had hoped to partition sustainable development and poverty eradication by including the latter in the title, the states finally opted to consider poverty eradication as an integral part of sustainable development. In this sense, the agreement embodies the concept of sustainable development—after more than 30 years of existence, the critics might say (*Sustainable Development of the Biosphere* report, Clark and Munn, 1986).

Consequences for COP21

The agreement postulates the existence of development paths that are compatible with one another and enable the joint achievement of goals. The developing countries will no longer be able to set the need to reduce poverty against the need to tackle global warming. Henceforth, both goals are part of the same plan for “transformation”.

More specifically, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, defined as one of the ways of implementing the SDGs, has begun to address the issue of additionality. Indeed, in response to requests from some developing countries, it recognises the idea of co-benefits and thus, implicitly, the impossibility of separating financing for development from financing for the climate for “well-designed actions”. Through these texts, climate mitigation and development are connected, and finance cannot be aggregated as if from two separate silos.

The time for commitments is over, and now is the time for action. The implementation of the agreement from 1 January 2016 will confirm its capacity to “transform our world” and to set development models on sustainable paths, for which an ambitious agreement in Paris remains a key condition.