

EU must champion strong sustainable development goals

Written by Seamus Jeffreson on 22 September 2014 in Opinion
Opinion

Seamus Jeffreson says world leaders must work together if the 'shared challenges' of poverty and inequality are to be eradicated.



For the last 15 years, the world has had a to-do list for eradicating poverty. At the turn of the millennium the world agreed on a set of goals for reducing poverty and inequality by 2015: the UN millennium development goals (MDGs).

World leaders will meet again at the UN general assembly in New York to continue the discussion on 'post-2015 sustainable development goals' to replace the MDGs.

The world is a very different place today than it was when the MDGs were designed. Global challenges today call for a new agenda to bring north and south, east and west together.

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There is poverty, inequality and injustice in Europe as there is in Asia, Africa, the US and Latin America. Inequality is a shared challenge: the world's richest 85 people are as wealthy as the poorest half of the entire world's population, according to our member Oxfam. Even in Europe, Women earn 16 per cent less than men.

Recovery from the economic crisis is imperceptible to most and in the EU, 24.8 per cent of the population, around 125 million people, are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, according to the European anti-poverty network.

Climate change too threatens all of us on the planet. In Europe "extreme weather events such as heat waves, floods and droughts have caused rising damage costs across Europe in recent years", according to the European environment agency.

This time around, we will need to agree on goals and targets that apply to us all - a truly universal agenda - not simply a set goals for others and haggling over who pays.

So, as the countdown begins, what is it that people around the world want from these new goals?

"What citizens are calling for, in Europe as well as internationally, is a just, equitable and sustainable world in which every person can realise their human rights"

Beyond 2015, a campaign by over 1000 civil society organisations in more than 130 countries and the European NGO confederation of NGOs for relief and development (Concord), which leads the campaign's work in Europe, have been gathering views and hopes on the new agenda since late 2010.

What citizens are calling for, in Europe as well as internationally, is a just, equitable and sustainable world in which every person can realise their human rights, fulfil their potential and live free from poverty, and where political and economic systems deliver wellbeing for all people within the limits of our planet's resources.

Outgoing development and environment commissioners Andris Piebalgs and Janez Potočnik, supported by Beyond 2015 Europe, leave a sound legacy with the commission's communication, 'A decent Life for all: from vision to collective action', which helps bring together development and environment together as two sides of the same coin.

Now, the post-2015 process has entered its final and most crucial year.

The EU council is currently working on a joint position which should combine Europe's ambitious rhetoric with concrete examples. This means spelling out what policies the EU will implement at home and abroad as part of the post-2015 framework.

The European parliament, as the voice of citizens, should push for an ambitious position. After all, it will be the parliament that has to translate future goals into the right policies for a transformational change to put people and planet first.

About the author

Seamus Jeffreson is director of the European NGO confederation for relief and development

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