

The EU, gender and the post-2015 framework

Executive Summary

As the world's largest donor, the European Union (EU) has had a significant part to play in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and is likely to have a similarly influential role in the post-2015 successor framework. The MDGs have in turn, had an impact on EU development assistance, with an expanding focus on social infrastructure and an increase, albeit insufficient, in financing levels.

The Gender and Development Network (GADN) has argued elsewhere that gender equality and women's and girls' rights must be central to the new framework (GADN 2013), both because the issue deserves priority in its own right and due to the deleterious impact that women's inequality has on the achievement of other goals.

Given the commitment to the MDGs by the EU, its own policy towards gender equality, and its approach thus far towards the post-2015 framework, there is potential for a clear leadership role for the EU in the forthcoming negotiations. A strong common negotiating position should promote the centrality of gender equality and women's rights within the framework. The EU should:

- Proactively propose a twin track approach with:
 - a) A specific standalone goal on gender equality and women's rights to ensure that the priority given to gender is at least as strong as that within the MDGs.
 - b) The mainstreaming of gender analysis throughout the framework, addressing the impact of gender relations on the way in which society is organised beyond the identification of women and girls as a 'vulnerable' group and the disaggregation of data.
 - Support and finance the call for better data as outlined in the High Level Panel report (2013) and the OECD (2013) report.
 - Call on all countries to develop systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment, as are being developed by UN Women.
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- Promote the Policy Coherence for Development Agenda within the context of the post-2015 framework.
- Reiterate its financial commitment to the MDGs and commit to providing increased financing specifically for gender equality and women's rights within the post-2015 framework.

Introduction

As the consultation moves into its final phase and inter-governmental negotiations begin; it is vital that UN member states build on the lessons of the MDGs to produce a strong framework for the post-2015 agenda. Many negotiations will be held between regional blocks, and the EU will have a critical role to play. GADN believes that the EU should build on the leadership role that its member states have played in the past, to ensure that gender equality and women's rights are at the centre of the new framework.

The inclusion of a goal on gender equality and women's empowerment in the MDGs reaped rewards as it led to increased funding, political commitment and technical know-how. However, despite these developments, progress has been slow and uneven.ⁱ Gender disparities remain pervasive and entrenched, and continue to be a major driver of poverty.ⁱⁱ In *Achieving Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the post-2015 Framework*, (GADN 2013) we explore the lessons of the MDGs and conclude that women's rights and gender equality must be a priority in the post-2015 framework. This is both because of the importance of women's empowerment in its own right, with women disproportionately represented among the poorest and most marginalised in the world, and because of the impact that gender inequality has on achieving other development goals.

In this briefing, we look first at the role of the EU in implementing the MDGs, then at the EU's own policy towards gender equality and finally at its approach thus far towards the post-2015 framework. Some specific recommendations for the way forward are then proposed.

The MDGs and the EU

The EU has been a major player in the MDGs in their design, as a regional block during inter-governmental negotiations, and in their implementation, as the world's largest donor. Since their agreement in 2000, the MDGs have shaped the EU approach to international development, influencing both the level and type of funding.

Level of funding

In 2011, the EU provided about €53 billion (or more than 50% of global aid) to developing countries, making it the largest donor of official development aid

worldwide.ⁱⁱⁱ Following the Millennium Declaration there was an initial increase in official development assistance (ODA) among EU member states (EU 2013). However, funding has not been sustained and it now seems that the EU is unlikely to meet its funding targets.^{iv} This shortfall has been acknowledged by Commissioner Piebalgs who has said that the EU should do more to meet the MDGs.^v The July 2013 Council Conclusions included the statement that:

“A key priority for Member States is to respect the EU's formal undertaking to collectively commit 0.7% of GNI to official development assistance by 2015, thus making a decisive step towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The EU and its Member States reaffirm all their individual and collective ODA commitments, taking into account the exceptional budgetary circumstances.”^{vi}

In addition to this bilateral aid, the EU budget (Heading 4 – Global Europe) and the European Development Fund (for ACP countries) are the main European funding sources for development cooperation. In 2008, the MDG contract was launched with funding devoted to pursuing the MDGs. It is a longer term, more predictable form of general budget support which started as part of the 10th European Development Fund (EDF). MDG Contracts were agreed in 8 countries (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia). Collectively these accounted for €1.8bn.^{vii} This was followed by the Commission's 12 point Action Plan and the MDG Initiative agreed in 2010, providing €1 billion.^{viii}

The direction of funding

The 2008 MDG contract allocated the majority of funding to health and education sectors. The 2010 Action Plan and MDG Initiative further focused new resources on those countries most successful in implementing the goals, and on the most off-track goals. Of the €1 billion initiative, €700 million targeted the most off-track MDGs (hunger, maternal health, child mortality and water and sanitation), while €300 million targets countries with a good track record in implementing aid.^{ix}

EU development policy is framed by the European Consensus on Development (EU 2005), which was revised and approved in the Agenda for Change (EC 2011). The Agenda further increased the focus on the countries most in need, including fragile states, and on the sectors which would bring most impact in priority areas namely: *“human rights, democracy and other key elements of good governance; inclusive and sustainable growth for human development.”^x*

The EU's main financing instrument for development from the EU budget, the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), sets benchmarks for EU spending, which require 20 per cent of spending to go to health and education sectors and there has been a significant increase in funds directed towards social infrastructure.^{xi} The EU 'non state actor' budget line has also been more focused towards those recipients prioritising MDG implementation.

Influencing the aid environment

The EU also plays a role in shaping the environment for development assistance.^{xii} *The European Report* (EU 2013), written by independent think-tanks by the commissioned by the European Commission, concludes that policy coherence for development (PCD) and the need, as outlined under MDG 8, to ensure that all policies (not just aid spending) contribute towards the achievement of the goals, has been a challenge for the EU. The authors conclude that PCD will need more prominence in the new post-2015 framework.

The impact

There is no systematic evaluation of the impact of EU funding on meeting the MDGs, however a report by Alliance 2015 suggests that funding on promoting gender equality actually fell between 2005 and 2008 and that the Commission's own evaluations of its country programmes showed that out of 13 evaluated, only two received a positive impact on promoting gender equality.^{xiii}

The EU and gender equality

The 2007 Conclusions of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council^{xiv} are clear on the priority that should be accorded to gender equality:

“Gender equality is a fundamental human right, a question of social justice and also a core value of the EU, including EU development policy... The promotion of gender equality and the enjoyment of human rights by women and girls are goals in their own right and also instrumental and key to achieving internationally agreed development goals.”^{xv}

The Council Conclusions go on to stress the relevance of gender equality beyond the social sectors to all other areas of policy, from economic growth to peace building and reconstruction, calling for policy-making in all areas to be coherent with gender equality and women's empowerment.^{xvi}

The *Agenda for Change* that sets the stage for EU development assistance, refers to the need to implement the *Gender Plan* (see below). Within the focus on human rights, democracy and good governance, one element is that:

“Gender equality and the empowerment of women as development actors and peace-builders will be mainstreamed in all EU development policies and programmes through its 2010 Gender Action Plan”^{xvii}

The *EU plan of action on gender equality and women's empowerment in development 2010–2015* (EC 2010) was endorsed by the Council in June 2010 and continues this

emphasis on relevance of gender equality to all areas of activity. A report by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI 2013) considers the *Gender Plan* to be both strong and innovative in recognising the importance of mainstreaming gender analysis across all policy and practice, moving beyond seeing women as a vulnerable group to recognising the role that gender relations play in shaping every area of development. While implementation remains a considerable challenge, the *Gender Plan* contains valuable lessons for the future and, suggests the ODI report, has implications for the post-2015 framework including:

- Strong mainstreaming of gender analysis across the post-2015 framework focusing on gender power relations rather than women and girls as a vulnerable group.
- Action on gender equality that extends beyond development policy to include the areas of foreign affairs, trade, environment and agriculture policy.
- Recommendations in the field of development coherent with internal EU policy, for example on the *Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015*.^{xviii}

The EU and the post-2015 framework

The EU and its Member States are moving towards common negotiating positions on the post-2015 framework, based partly on a variety of consultation processes and reports. Some of the contributions have referred specifically to gender, others set a context in which to further progress gender equality goals. All make it clear that the two processes, post MDGs and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should be brought together.

In February 2012, the **European Commission** published *A Decent Life for All – Ending poverty and giving the world a sustainable future* (EC 2012), which suggested five building blocks for a new overarching framework for poverty elimination and sustainable development:

- *“Basic living standards for all, under which no-one should fall: finish the unfinished business of the MDGs and establish new, modernised goals which should apply to every citizen in the world.*
- *Promoting “drivers” of inclusive and sustainable growth: investing in infrastructure or energy creates growth and decent jobs, while boosting human development.*
- *More sustainable management of natural resources: this is vital if we are to halt environmental degradation.*
- *Equality, equity and justice: not only values in themselves, but also fundamental for poverty reduction and sustainable development.*
- *Tackling insecurity and state fragility, which impede poverty reduction and sustainable development.”*

The paper recognises that justice and equity have value beyond their role in meeting the other MDGs goals. Gender equality is not covered in detail, but the paper calls for a framework that provides a catalyst for women's empowerment with a focus on human rights and reducing inequalities, with improved implementation spurred on by a set of social guarantees. It goes on to say:

“The framework should also address justice, equality and equity, capturing issues relating to human rights, democracy and the rule of law, as well as the empowerment of women and gender equality, which are vital for inclusive and sustainable development, as well as important values in their own right.”^{xix}

In the Annex to the report, actions are listed that are supposed to contribute to the implementation of Rio+20 conclusions. These focus on the mainstreaming of gender equality and women's rights through the EU Gender Action Plan 2010-2015 and follow up to Beijing Platform for Action. Specifically:

“Mainstream gender equality and the empowerment of women in EU development policies; implement the 2010-2015 EU Gender Action Plan in development cooperation; contribution to the UN programme increasing accountability on financing for gender equality. Implement actions for women's economic empowerment through the Investment in People programme. Implement Actions in the ‘Communication Social Protection in European Union Development Co-operation.’^{xx}

Commissioner Andris Piebalgs European Commissioner for Development, was a member of the **High Level Panel (HLP)**. The report of the HLP proposes what it calls five big transformative shifts, which should shape the post-2015 agenda. The report proposes 12 ‘illustrative goals,’ one of which is: ‘Empower Girls and Women and Achieve Gender Equality’ and argues that gender equality is an important issue in its own right, with a standalone goal necessary to catalyze progress. The HLP report further adds the recommendation that:

“Gender equality is integrated across all of the goals, both in specific targets and by making sure that targets are measured separately for women and men, or girls and boys, where appropriate.”^{xxi}

At the eighth **Open Working Group** discussion on *Promoting equality, including social equity, gender equality and women's empowerment* Commissioner Piebalgs, for the EU, supported a strong focus on the empowerment of women and girls and gender equality, seeing it as a priority. A position was not yet taken on a standalone goal. However, a number of member states including Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Netherlands, UK, Spain and Italy all called for a standalone goal and mainstreaming.^{xxii}

A common EU position was agreed by the **Council of the European Union General Affairs Council** meeting on the Overarching Post 2015 Agenda in June 2013 included the following conclusion:

“16. The Council emphasises that the framework should recognise that poverty eradication and sustainable development are mutually reinforcing and interlinked and therefore should:

e) Ensure a rights-based approach encompassing all human rights. It should also address justice, equality and equity, good governance, democracy and the rule of law, with a strong focus on the empowerment and rights of women and girls and gender equality, and on preventing and combating violence against women as essential preconditions for equitable and inclusive sustainable development, as well as important values and objectives in themselves. We remain committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of their review conferences and in this context sexual and reproductive health and rights.”^{xxiii}

In its meeting in February 2014 the Foreign Affairs Council reaffirmed its commitment to an approach based on rights and equity. Paragraph 16 states that:

“The EU will work to advance women's rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment throughout the year. We remain committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of their review conferences and in this context sexual and reproductive health and rights (see Council documents 10914/13 and 11656/13). The EU will continue to be vocal against all forms of violence against women, including sexual violence in conflict, and encourage the UN to be active in this area. The EU will continue to promote UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security. The EU will continue to strive towards the eradication of female genital mutilation and build on the successful adoption of resolutions at the Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly on child, early, and forced marriage.

In Paragraph 17 there is specific mention of the post-2015 framework:

“The EU will strive to ensure the inclusion of a rights-based approach, encompassing all human rights, and gender equality, in the post-2015 global agenda”.

The **European Parliament** report *Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015, A strong EU engagement* (EP 2013b), identifies weaknesses in the MDGs around inequalities within and between countries, and limitations in the value of the indicators

used. It proposes that the new structure should have an increased focus on the most marginalised and more appropriate indicators under each target.

A **European Parliament resolution** (EP 2013a) *Millennium Development Goals – defining the post-2015 framework* was agreed in May 2013. It recognises that the situation of women has not progressed and recommends that in defining the EU position consideration should be given to “*accelerating gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women at all levels of society*”.

The **European Parliament Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality** (2013) also provided an opinion to the draft resolution. The broad call outlined in point 6 (below) is accompanied by detailed and specific recommendations:

“6. Calls for the post-2015 MDG framework to set ambitious targets for women’s rights and gender equality in terms of women’s empowerment and well-being, women’s full and equal participation in decision-making in public life, whether in the political, economic, social or environmental sphere, combating violence against women, access to quality education (at primary, secondary and higher levels) and training, promotion of universal health coverage through health systems which are public and free at the point of use, access to micro-credit facilities in order to combat poverty and social exclusion, access to effective, quality health care, universal access to and improvements in sexual and reproductive health and rights, the quality and stability of employment, equal pay, career development, the representation of women in politics and economic activity, and ownership and inheritance rights.”

The way forward

Some EU member states have played a vital leadership role in the promotion of gender equality on the international stage. As 2015 draws closer, it is time once again for the EU to work closely with other governments and regional blocks to promote a strong approach within the new framework and ensure that the advances made under the MDGs on gender equality are promoted and furthered.

The EU has, rightly, waited to hear the outcomes of consultations and the views of other member states before reaching conclusions. After over two years of consultations and reports a number of governments, regional blocks including the African Union^{xxiv}, international organisations, and the High Level Panel (2013) have all called for priority to be given to gender equality with a dedicated goal. Moreover women’s organisations and networks from every continent have echoed these calls.^{xxv}

In February 2013, the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development in its 8th session (OWG-8) met to discuss: promoting equality, including social equity, gender equality and women’s empowerment. The Co-Chairs’ summary of the session affirmed that gender equality was an end in itself as well as an essential means for sustainable

development and poverty eradication, recognising gender inequality is the most pervasive form of inequality in the world. They also concluded that there was widespread support for a stand-alone goal on gender equality, supplemented by cross-cutting targets under other goals. It seems gender equality, and a standalone goal, are now firmly on the negotiating table.^{xxvi}

Recommendations

The EU should adopt a strong common position in the forthcoming negotiations, taking a leadership role in promoting the centrality of gender equality and women's rights within the framework. The GADN has elsewhere detailed specific proposals on targets and indicators that we suggest the EU should also support (GADN 2014). In addition, given its role as a major donor, the EU should:

- Proactively propose a twin track approach with:
 - a) A specific standalone goal on gender equality and women's rights to ensure that the priority given to gender is at least as strong as that within the MDGs.
 - b) The mainstreaming of gender analysis throughout the framework, addressing the impact of gender relations on the way in which society is organised beyond the identification of women and girls as a 'vulnerable' group and the disaggregation of data.
- Support and finance the call for better data as outlined in the High Level Panel report (2013) and the OECD (2013) report.
- Call on all countries to develop systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment, as are being developed by UN Women.
- Promote the Policy Coherence for Development Agenda within the context of the post-2015 framework.
- Reiterate its financial commitment to the MDGs and commit to providing increased financing specifically for gender equality and women's rights within the post-2015 framework.

Acknowledgments:

Written by Jessica Woodroffe for the Gender and Development Network. Thanks to Mikaela Gavvas, Helen O'Connell and Tori Timms, any errors remain the responsibility of the author.

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The Gender & Development Network (GADN) brings together expert NGOs, consultants, academics and individuals committed to working on gender, development and women's rights issues. Our vision is of a world where social justice and gender equality prevail and where all women and girls are able to realise their rights free from discrimination. Our goal is to ensure that international development policy and practice promotes gender equality and women's and girls' rights. Our role is to support our members by sharing information and expertise, to undertake and disseminate research, and to provide expert advice and comment on government policies and projects.

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Working groups

GADN brings together development practitioners, experts and academics working on thematic issues through working groups. The post-2015 working group's aim is to improve the post-2015 framework so that it better promotes women's and girls' rights and gender equity.

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