

A new global partnership

European Civil Society
Positions on the
Post-2015 Framework

Conference conclusions



European Economic and Social Committee



On 13 and 14 February 2014, over 150 civil society representatives gathered at the European Economic and Social Committee to voice and discuss their positions on a global Post-2015 framework for poverty eradication and sustainable development. Participants from local, regional and national authorities, EU and UN level policy-makers, social partners, organisations and networks active in the field of development, the environment, human rights, agriculture and consumer protection; industry, business and academia brought a wealth of perspectives into the debate. This summary of key points from the discussions, prepared by the Conference organisers, will be brought to the attention of EU decision-makers in order to contribute to the formulation of a strong and ambitious EU negotiating position on the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda.



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European Civil Society Positions on the Post-2015 Framework

EESC Conference, 13-14 February 2014, EESC, Brussels

CONFERENCE CONCLUSIONS

1. The Conference participants called on the EU institutions and Member States to provide leadership towards an **ambitious, universally applicable and integrated Post-2015 agenda for sustainable development**, and to formulate a strong, clear EU position as soon as possible.
2. The Post-2015 agenda should bring about the transformation necessary to **turn our century of fragility into a century of sustainability, and to ensure well-being for present and future generations**. This new agenda should be based on social justice, non-discrimination and the advancement of human rights, equitable sharing of global resources and respect for the planetary boundaries.
3. The Post-2015 sustainable development agenda should be developed and implemented in a **global partnership** between governments and civil society at all levels, communities, local and regional authorities, individuals and businesses, with a strong sense of our common but differentiated responsibilities, in a spirit of solidarity, mutual respect and relations between all human beings based on dignity, equality and non-discrimination.
4. **Accountability and policy coherence** should be at the foundation of the Post-2015 agenda. Participants urged the EU and Member States to ensure that all their policies contribute to the fight against poverty and environmental degradation, with special attention to the most vulnerable groups. Global sustainability issues need to be integrated and adequately addressed in the Europe 2020 strategy revision. Key further areas where policy needs to be made more coherent include trade, climate change, agriculture, energy, environment and biodiversity protection, transport, health, regional and urban development, migration, mobility of labour, job creation, social protection, and the fight against corruption and money laundering.

5. **There was agreement that freeing humanity from poverty and hunger** should remain an urgent and pre-eminent objective, but within a wider Post-2015 agenda addressing the root causes of poverty, inequality and environmental degradation. A new, **multi-dimensional and integrated approach** should empower people to move out of poverty and give a strong voice to the most vulnerable and excluded. Participants highlighted the fact that humanity has the natural and financial resources necessary to eradicate poverty, but key issues that need to be resolved include the global distribution of wealth, closing the gap between the rich and the poor, and ensuring more equitable access to resources.
6. The Post-2015 sustainable development agenda should aim to ensure universal access to healthy and affordable food, safe water and sanitation, and sustainable energy. Stakeholders called for these basic needs to be secured through **strong policies supporting sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries, integrated water management schemes and renewable energy**.
7. Participants emphasised that the Post-2015 agenda should be based on **non-discrimination and human rights**, which constitute essential preconditions and powerful drivers for human development. High priority must be accorded to **peace and security**, including specific measures to help fragile and conflict-affected states. Violent conflicts and the failure of fragile states to provide security to their citizens, in particular to the most vulnerable and poorest social groups, have been major obstacles to achieving the MDGs in some regions and states.
8. A strong common message that emerged from the debate was that **gender equality and the empowerment of women must be a central and imperative goal**, as well as an enabler integrated throughout the Post-2015 agenda, putting an end to discrimination and violence against women and ensuring their rights, active participation at all levels of decision-making, access to education, health services, property rights, productive assets (including land) and credit, and reproductive health and rights.
9. Speakers and panellists emphasised that **employment, decent work, and universal social protection** (including social protection floors) should be key elements of the Post-2015 agenda. Standards and implementation mechanisms, social dialogue and collective bargaining are fundamental means to ensure inclusive development and social justice.

10. **Health** should be addressed in the new agenda in a more holistic way than just as a medical issue, or a service. While universal access to good quality and affordable health services, maternal and child health and the fight against diseases such as malaria and AIDS should remain in the focus, greater attention should be paid to factors that influence human health, such as a healthy environment, lifestyles and working conditions and animal health.
11. Participants emphasised the role of **education** as an essential factor in empowering people, especially women and girls, to move out of poverty, and called for: universal access to good quality primary education; continuous improvement in access to, and the quality of, secondary education; and vocational training oriented towards the skills required by the market. **Education for sustainable development** must be given especially strong support, encompassing the skills needed to develop the green economy and green jobs.
12. Human well-being and economic development depend directly on natural resources and the Earth's life support systems. A Post-2015 agenda underpinned by this recognition must define **a safe and just operating space for humanity within the planetary boundaries**, steering away from the tipping points of global environmental degradation. Areas to be urgently addressed include **halting the dramatic global biodiversity decline**, protecting and restoring essential ecosystems, and supporting **nature-based solutions**.
13. **Climate change** is recognised as one of the greatest threats to human development, and an area in which humanity has probably already transgressed the planetary boundaries. Its impacts will affect all economies in the long run but will hit people living in poverty the hardest. Climate change mitigation and adaptation should be given global priority, in line with ongoing policy processes and international commitments. The Sustainable Energy for All initiative will play an important role in ensuring basic energy needs for development, while protecting the climate.
14. A universal Post-2015 agenda should enable a **global shift to sustainable production and consumption** involving developed and developing countries as well as the emerging economies. In addition to accelerating the transition in their own countries, developed countries will need to review their impacts so as to ensure that their trading and investment activities contribute to the sustainability transition in other parts of the world. The EU should provide a leading example by developing policies to make sustainable choices accessible and affordable for all consumers, and encouraging alternative consumption models such as using services, rather than owning products.

15. Participants called for **global resource use goals** with differentiated national targets and indicators to ensure equitable sharing. The scientific basis for assessing and forecasting resource availability should be strengthened, e.g. in the framework of the International Resource Panel.
16. As urbanisation will be one of the key defining global trends in the coming decades, **sustainable cities and urban development must be given a central place in the Post-2015 framework**. Drawing on the success of the local Agenda 21, participants suggested a similar approach for the Post-2015 framework to create local ownership of and support for the process. Urban and rural development should be closely integrated. Cooperation between local and regional authorities within and outside of Europe should also be strengthened.
17. **Business and industry** should play a key role in the eradication of poverty and in the transition to sustainable production and consumption as providers of goods, services and good quality jobs and drivers for creativity, innovation and improved resource efficiency. In order to achieve these goals, governments should set up appropriate regulatory frameworks that will create a level playing field for sustainable businesses and an enabling environment for entrepreneurship and innovation. Possible measures include start-up facilities; scaling up existing good practices, the provision of technical assistance services, and training in core business skills. The conditions for doing business should be improved for SMEs in particular, since they have the greatest potential for creating good quality jobs and reducing poverty.
18. At the same time, participants highlighted governments' responsibility for setting and enforcing **social and environmental standards and ensuring corporate accountability**, in addition to voluntary corporate social and environmental responsibility schemes such as the Global Reporting Initiative, the UN Global Compact principles and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Compliance with the ILO labour standards, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights is crucial to the success of poverty eradication and sustainable socio-economic development. Participants further called for EU support for international legally binding frameworks such as the Aarhus Convention and an International Court for Environmental Crimes.
19. **Spending standards** by national and local governments, banks and investment agencies should comply with clearly set ethical and sustainability criteria and favour a long-term perspective and green economy investments. **Access to finance** should be facilitated for women, people living in poverty, indigenous peoples and other marginalised groups, namely by universalising the availability of microcredit at affordable interest rates, and of micro-insurance.

20. Participants emphasised the importance of **tackling corruption and illicit financial flows** through the Post-2015 agenda, including by the setting of universal targets and national frameworks to prevent money laundering, tax evasion, and foreign bribery.
21. The Post-2015 agenda must support strong, **transparent, accountable, capable and adequately resourced local and national governments and empowered citizens**, so that civil society and local communities can influence decision-making and contribute to poverty elimination and to sustainable economic and social development.
22. The **Post-2015 sustainable development framework should be clearly structured**, with universal and integrated global goals, concrete national commitments, guaranteed sources of financing and regular independent monitoring and review mechanisms to measure progress on the international, national and sub-national levels, in order to avoid the accountability gaps of the MDGs. Existing UN institutions could play an important role in guiding and monitoring the implementation in their fields of expertise.
23. **The importance of reliable data collection** was emphasised as a prerequisite for monitoring the implementation of the future agenda, and an area in which major improvements are still needed. Data disaggregated by income group, gender, disability, rural-urban split, minority and social status and age should be complemented by qualitative methods and take advantage of the participation of civil society in the collection and dissemination processes.
24. In putting human and planetary well-being at the centre of the Post-2015 sustainable development agenda, participants urged policy-makers to adopt a dashboard of **alternative and more relevant measures of human wellbeing**, sustainability and quality of life, moving beyond the use of macro-economic indicators (such as GDP) alone.
25. **Participation** must not be limited to the design of the framework but be a central piece in its implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The implementation process should be transparent and inclusive. It should also be supported by democratic governance structures to ensure that people, in particular marginalised and vulnerable groups, will be involved in the monitoring of the implementation and will be in a position to enforce their rights. The Post-2015 framework can provide an opportunity, through a focus on meaningful participation, to construct new relationships based on legitimacy, just governance, transparency and accountability.

For all presentations and information on the EESC conference,
please visit the event webpage:
eesc.europa.eu/post-2015-framework

For further information or questions, please write to:
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