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Development policy is essential to
overcoming international crises, but
it must change

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Development policy is essential to overcoming international crises, but it must change

Bonn, 9 January 2017. How will we sum up 2017 in 12 months' time? 2015 was a year in which the international community concluded ground-breaking accords on climate policy and global sustainable development. For many, this boosted their confidence once more in what could be achieved through purposeful international cooperation. And yet 2016, which saw Brexit in the UK, the US election result and electoral gains by the AfD party in Germany, showed that there are a large number of people in Europe and the US who do not share this confidence. Worse still, many consider international cooperation unnecessary and interdependence harmful to their own nations' prosperity. They wish to return to an emphasis on national interests and national policy as the solution.

Consequently, 2017 will be the year in which we must strive to establish the importance, goals, content and forms of international cooperation. In Germany, elections at national and federal state level will provide an arena for such debates. We need to consider the following questions when making decisions: to what extent is it both a human and a political necessity to also respect the right of people in other countries and of future generations to a life in dignity? To what extent does our own well-being depend on others giving consideration to our rights too? It is not trivial to emphasise that we live in an interconnected, globalised world in which problems cannot be solved by individual nations in isolation.

The principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provide answers to the foundational questions just mentioned: achieving sustainable prosperity is a universal task with indivisible goals that cover a range of policy fields, i.e. health care, education, decent work, infrastructure, innovation, climate change mitigation, environmental protection and marine conservation. It requires international cooperation, revolving as it does around solidarity and global common goods. Leave no one behind means that the situation of the poor needs to improve with regards to all goals: prosperity that does not extend to them is no prosperity at all.

We will need to spell out in coming years the relevance of these principles to the political decision-making process in Germany and Europe if we are to define and achieve sustainable development goals in domestic and foreign policy. To this end, we must review our foreign relations at political, economic and cultural level to establish whether they accord with these principles and to determine which rules need to be changed or reinterpreted to promote fairness in our dealings with one another.

The German Government intends to use its G20 Presidency to promote this ambition and make it a reality. With this in mind, it is drawing on support from society, organized in the G20 engagement groups: business, science / think tanks, civil society, women, and labour. A wise move, as shifts in the balance of power (e.g. in the US and Europe) have left the G20 states appearing politically fragile in terms of their common and normative basis

for action and their sense of direction, and such shifts are usually accompanied by a redefinition of related responsibilities.

What do the principles of the 2030 Agenda mean for development policy?

The principle of universality requires development policy to play its part in ensuring that developing countries and emerging economies are seen as partners to sustainable development in industrialised nations. The aim is to replace the traditional North-South partnership with a global partnership between equals. This means that unequal partners from all country groups need to be open to learning from one another and making relevant changes.

More than ever, donor countries must gear themselves to the priorities of their partners and adopt a more coordinated and collaborative approach to do justice to the breadth and indivisibility of the Agenda's goals. The common procedures for coordinating development policy in the EU provide a healthy framework for achieving this, as does the World Bank, regional banks and the UN organisations. Efforts are also needed to establish partnerships with new actors such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank. This is the only way to ensure that all Sustainable Development Goals are addressed and that all countries benefit from these joint efforts.

Increasing the development budget will not be sufficient to strengthen international cooperation. It is necessary to have a great deal of stamina, as such fundamental change processes cannot be achieved in a short space of time. Consequently, we need jointly agreed, medium-term goals and outcomes upon which all stakeholders can rely in order for cooperation to be effective. This will require courage to innovate as well as the freedom to make mistakes.

Finally, we must address the issue of distribution in order to leave no one behind: development policy needs to serve the poor and vulnerable, directly and indirectly. It is capable of doing so, but not without the support of others. Development policy actors require the cooperation of motivated governments and effective, accountable institutions in the partner countries. There is also a need for significant efforts on the part of German and European actors in the fields of trade, finance, taxation, and foreign and security policy. And not only to avoid causing harm to the poor and vulnerable, but also to promote the rights of these individuals to a dignified life.

In this way, it will be possible to achieve a form of international cooperation based on reciprocity and trust which recognises the rights and interests of others and is geared towards fair and universal rules.