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## SPECIAL EVENT ON THE MDG IN NEW YORK: a missed opportunity

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2014 will be a decisive year for the international development community, since they will have to perform a double endeavour: on the one hand, try to accelerate and measure the outcomes of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and on the other hand, intensify intergovernmental negotiations to set the new development agenda. During the Special Event on the MDGs (**MDGs Special Event**) held on the 68th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, heads of state and government were called to adopt an **outcome document** that could account for the progress towards the MDGs and help define the guidelines and roadmap to advance the definition of the post-2015 agenda. After an intensive week of meetings in New York, the balance is rather poor in results, and it could be argued that with regard to the future of the international development agenda, everything is yet to be decided.

Perhaps the highlight of the document is that it points out the significant gaps which persist in achieving the MDGs a few months away from the scheduled date for their achievement, and the fact of exhorting States to meet financing commitments for development at a time when, according to the latest data available (2011), the ODA of OECD countries experienced a decline not seen since 1997. But with regard to the guidelines for the new agenda, it is a low-profile document that tries to please the different sensitivities, and that does not solve most of the questions (sometimes dilemmas) that shadow over the future development agenda. In short, the Special Event on the MDGs has proven to be a missed opportunity to begin the process of policy prioritization.

Indeed, the *outcome document* suffers from the typical weaknesses of summative logic characteristic of documents that precede political negotiation. Unlike the **High Level Panel** report for the post-2015, the document does not advance any proposal and tries to maintain a calculated balance between the continuity options favouring that the new agenda is kept in a sort of MDGs plus, and the maximalist options, if not disruptive, which bet on a new development agenda.

A major unresolved dilemma is the tension between the environmental agenda and the poverty agenda. This was evident in Rio +20 which staged conflicting

positions between actors such as the EU pushing for green economy, and the G-77 countries questioning whether this commitment is consistent with a pro-poor growth. The pragmatic exercise of the *outcome document* remains a vague desire that advocates for the adoption of a single framework of objectives to seek the balance between the three dimensions of sustainable development. But the truth is that it will not be easy to converge two agendas that do not always coincide: the one inherited from the MDGs and the one inherited from the Sustainable Development Goals, which the Open Working Group on SDG arising from Rio +20 must present.

The same exercise in pragmatism will need acrobatic stunts in order to add to the agenda MDG-plus in a pure *Christmas Tree* logic (*to add ornaments to the Christmas tree*) those elements that have been part of the debate process and that emerge from hyper-participatory national, regional, and virtual consultations that have taken place during 2013 and that target both large issues absent from the MDGs, as well as other emerging issues. The *outcome document* lists some of them: democratic governance and human rights, peace and security, gender equality. But it ignores other important issues on which various stakeholders - academics, civil society, partner countries, etc. - have insisted throughout the consultation process. One that has garnered greater consensus is the importance of addressing inequalities as a fundamental axis to the future development agenda.

As many studies have showed, the poverty map has changed substantially compared to 2000, when the population living in poverty was mostly concentrated in the least developed countries, currently concentrating mainly in middle-income countries (many of these emerging economies) and in Fragile States. This raises, in the terms used by Andy Sumner, a researcher at the Center for Global Development, a double dilemma: How to articulate a development agenda with countries that do not depend on ODA, in the case of middle-income countries, or who are not able to manage it, in the case of fragile states? The answers are concurrent, although the *outcome document* does not include any of them: to encourage and promote, on the one hand, redistributive policies at the national level, and on the other hand, back a global partnership between traditional donors and partner countries in which both parts take co-responsibility in the provision of global public goods and the promotion of coherent policies that go beyond the management of ODA flows.

But perhaps the most important absence in this document is not referring to the need to renew the architecture on which the new development agenda should be based. Several change factors converge and point in this direction: the emergence of new regional and global powers that require a redefinition of the decision-making spaces, the growing role of local and regional governments in the development process, the growing weight of philanthropic foundations and civil society, and the unquestionable, though controversial, role of the private sector in promoting growth. The emergence of new actors and new development tools will require, necessarily, moving from an agenda of coordination of flows between donors of ODA to a global development agenda based on inclusive multilateralism. This finding, which is already part of the collective discourse, with actors such as the EU and OECD feeding it - does not appear in any of the paragraphs of the final document.

It will be necessary to wait, therefore, until the next session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, when the intergovernmental political negotiations for the adoption of the new agenda will formally begin, to know if it is able to realize the inalienable exercise of political prioritization.