

## **Human rights have become an integral part of most donors' development cooperation.**

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In recent decades – and in particular since the end of the cold war – human rights and the related concepts of good governance, democracy and the rule of law have become an integral element of most donors' international development cooperation. The link between human rights and development has been confirmed in a series of international conferences, such as the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights and the 2000 Millennium Summit. Human rights have an intrinsic value, and signatories of international human rights treaties have a duty to respect, promote and fulfil human rights, including in their international work. In fact, extreme poverty and a lack of human development may amount to violations of human rights, because the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights includes the rights to food, water, education and adequate housing as human rights. Increasingly, the promotion of human rights – in particular political rights and civil liberties – is recognised as having an additional, instrumental value, and even as being a precondition for sustainable development. There are authoritarian countries that have made major strides in promoting human development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, some empirical evidencesuggests that the conditions in free and pluralistic societies are more conducive to socio economic progress and to respecting economic and social rights. Such conditions are far from universal, however. The clash between governments' commitments to respect rights and their follow-through is regularly mapped by the World Bank's World Wide Governance Indicators and the Social and Economic Rights Fulfilment Index, which measure daily violations of people's rights to 'voice and accountability' and to a life in dignity.

The 2030 Transformative Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by the UN in September 2015, confirm the link between human rights and development; the agenda is explicitly grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in international human rights treaties. In contrast to the MDGs, the SDGs include a goal on peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions. However, debates over the human rights formulations in the SDG agenda have been heated, and the implementation is

likely to reveal fault lines between different countries' conceptions of human rights and between democratic and authoritarian UN Members.

At the EU level, integrating human rights into all external policies, including development cooperation, is a requirement of the Lisbon Treaty. Since the early 1990s, policies have become more systematic and refined. The 2006 European Consensus on Development recognises human rights as an intrinsic element of sustainable development, and the complementary 2011 Agenda for Change makes human rights, governance and related concepts one of the two major pillars of EU development cooperation. The 2012 Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy and the new Action Plan, adopted in 2015, have reaffirmed the EU's commitment to mainstreaming human rights across all policies and include a pledge to intensify efforts to promote social and economic rights. In the field of development, the EU's approaches can be classified into three main categories.

Firstly, the EU has developed a comprehensive and increasingly diversified system of human rights conditionality, with human rights clauses in international agreements, good governance incentives and human rights progress requirements for budget support. Under the Generalised System of Preferences, special trade incentives for the poorest countries have been designed to reward the implementation of core labour rights and environmental conventions; preferences can also be withdrawn in case of serious violations of human rights. The EU's conditionality has traditionally been applied in a positive and dynamic manner. Yet the EU has also been criticised for a lack of coherence in its sanction decisions.

Secondly, development assistance is used to directly support projects and programmes promoting human rights, democracy and good governance. The EU institutions invested USD 1.504 billion in governance and civil society in 2013, representing 9 % of official sector-allocable aid. If the EU adheres to its 'Agenda for Change', this proportion may grow during the 2014-2020 programming period. The 2014-2020 Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) even includes a benchmark: 15 % of all geographic funding is to be spent on human rights, democracy and good governance.

The third – and perhaps the most important – angle is the EU's effort to mainstream human rights as a cross-cutting element in all development actions. This has been reinforced by the EU's commitment to apply a rights-based approach to development. Based on the principles of universality, the indivisibility of human rights, inclusion and participation in decision-making processes, non-discrimination, equality and equity, accountability and transparency, this approach means turning away from 'service delivery' and towards a model that empowers active citizens who

know their rights and are involved in development processes. The approach has the potential to alter existing power relations. Its implementation will not be easy. The European Parliament has always strongly supported effectively integrating human rights into development cooperation, at both the EU and international levels. In its resolution on the Agenda for Change, Parliament called on the Commission and the EU External Action Service (EEAS) to live up to their pledge for a human rights-based approach throughout the development cooperation process, and insisted on devoting equal attention to social, economic and cultural rights. Parliament also strongly called for a rights-based approach to the SDG agenda. The EP has developed its own parliamentary tools to promote human rights and support human rights defenders, including its resolution on the EU's annual reports on human rights, urgency resolutions on individual cases, parliamentary diplomacy exercised through delegations and interparliamentary assemblies, and the Sakharov prize for freedom of thought. Parliament has also been adamant in its demand for more forceful rules and policies for the development agenda, including regarding the right to food and 'land grabbing', the human rights obligations of businesses, the integration of human rights in trade agreements, non-discrimination (including on grounds of sexual orientation) and – most recently – the human rights of migrants.

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