

Government policy on development assistance for SDGs – discussion entry point

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The fundamental difference between the MDGs and SDGs lies in the universality of the latter. It relates both to the sectoral scope as well as to geographic coverage. While for the MDGs donor's participation was limited to the role of development assistance providers, now they have committed to both achieve SDGs internally and support external partners.

This new reality can take shape in national donor strategies on SDGs implementation in several ways. First, donors can concentrate on their domestic policies and outline donor activities only in regard to SDG 17. Second, they can provide internal and external dimension to each of the 17 goals. That seems to be the way in which China's National Plan on Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is organized. One more approach has been manifested by the German National Sustainable Development Strategy. It considers three layers for each SDG and thus realizes the policy coherence principle:

- 1) National challenges, with regard to implementation and impacts in Germany;
- 2) Global responsibility, with regard to impacts in other countries and on global public goods;
- 3) Support for other countries, with regard to supporting other countries through international cooperation.

As for Russia, it is hard to say what shape its strategy of integrating and localizing the SDGs will take. First, the new agenda has been mostly associated with climate. For example, the responsibility to investigate the alignment of Russian internal policies with the 2030 agenda was delegated to the Interdepartmental Working Group on Climate Change and Sustainable Development chaired by the President's Advisor Alexander Bedritsky. Previously the Group has never dealt with issues of development assistance. So it seems that the climate component of the new agenda is taking the most prominent place in Russia's thinking around its integration. One potential explanation can lie in the fact that for other issues Russia's performance is already quite high, for example, in regard to such indicators as literacy, maternal mortality and so forth. Also it seems that there is a clear divide (strategic and institutional) between the internal and external agenda.

Second, the new agenda has once again revealed the lack of clear institutional structure in Russian development assistance. No one is championing the agenda to drive the coherent strategy development. One prevailing view is that 2030 agenda is so vast that everything what Russia does in development assistance falls under it anyway, so there is no need to reinvent existing strategies. However the strategic alignment of SDGs with national development assistance is not just about making sure that everything conforms to the agenda (indeed it covers almost everything), but about setting the priorities and this seems to be the weakest part. Important questions to be asked include: 'How to make sure our assistance responds to the changes associated with the move from MDGs to SDGs?', 'How to bridge the internal and external dimensions of the SDGs?', 'Should the external support be provided in the areas where Russia's internal performance is best or in the areas where mutual learning can benefit both sides?', etc.

Do the recent efforts of the various donors to develop the SDGs strategies just capture the existing approaches and programmes only representing them in a new format or really drive some changes - is an important research question to follow. In Russian case it seems the buy-in for the 2030 agenda is quite low and in the absence of a champion driving the change all the efforts would be more in the direction of documenting the existing approaches and programmes. Such scenario conforms to the recent trend of Russian development assistance to be more aligned with its foreign policy imperatives rather than with global agendas. Whether this is good or bad for its developing partners is a much

disputed question. Some studies show that strong donor interests are an important factor of development assistance effectiveness.