

## **Cooperation within the Post-2015 Development Agenda: Opportunities for the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean**

*by Alicia Bárcena Ibarra\**

2015 is a year of historical importance, with special significance for those of us who work on development issues. This year, the so-called "Post 2015 Development Agenda" has been discussed multilaterally at the headquarters of the United Nations, through an unprecedented participatory process. This process culminated on August 1st with an agreement on the document "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" to be submitted for approval by member countries of the UN in the framework of the General Assembly in September this year. It Contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 objectives. Once adopted, it will replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set in 2000, and will guide the work of the international community for the next 15 years.

This new Agenda integrates the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, from a universal and transformative perspective, and seeks "to leave no one behind". Its universalist nature implies in itself a paradigm shift. This approach has evolved from its central focus on the pursuit of poverty eradication, the central concern of the MDGs, to a scheme that, far from being exclusively directed to developing countries, calls for all countries, rich and poor, to work together in a new and strengthened global partnership. A partnership governed by the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities<sup>1</sup>, aiming to achieve sustainable development with equality within planetary limits.

When we speak about universality in the context of the new Development Agenda, we cannot ignore the unavoidable fact that, not all countries, and not all regions have the same starting point. An agenda which considers the different capacities of all actors, reveals itself more just and creates true conditions to close the gaps and the inequality that have kept the rich and the poor countries in different fields- sometimes opposed- in intergovernmental negotiations. The new agenda unifies paths towards a common destination of global sustainable development.

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<sup>1</sup> The term of common but differentiated responsibilities emerged as the Principle 7 of the Rio Declaration at the first Earth Summit in Rio in 1992

(<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?documentid=78&articleid=1163>).

At that moment, it was used to refer to the differentiated State's contributions to global environmental degradation in the context of sustainable development. Later, this term was included directly in paragraph 15 of the outcome document "The Future We Want" of the Rio +20 Summit in 2012 and in the paragraph 5 of the introduction to the document that resulted from the Open-Ended Working Group in 2014. At the same time, this document, served as basis for the negotiations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Although Principle 7 was used specifically for environmental issues, its posterior inclusion in these documents implied that it would be applicable to the three- economic, social, and environmental- pillars of sustainable development as a whole.

From the Latin America and the Caribbean standpoint, this new Agenda provides a renewed toolbox to tackle our main structural pending debt: the persistence of inequality.

Our region is at a crossroads, on the one hand, facing unfavourable external conditions (stagnation of the international economy and falling prices of raw materials, for example) and on the other, is hampered by internal unsustainable development schemes (for example high segregation in the provision of quality public services and production patterns, consumption or fragile urbanization). Therefore, our countries need a genuine structural change in their production structure, which locates knowledge, technology and innovation at its centre. That achievement would allow for an effective and sustainable path towards more just and inclusive societies, and would incorporate as its identifying features, among others, social protection and inclusion, environmental sustainability, decent work for all and physical, political and economic autonomy of women and girls.

This urgent challenge demands the participation of all actors - state, market and civil society- articulated in a new, participative and inclusive equation, provided with an original wide set of social pacts. It is a challenge that benefits itself from the participation of the region's strategic partners such as the European Union, with which it shares essential values and a historic political dialogue on development patterns, social cohesion models and regional and sub- regional integration mechanisms.

Fortunately, the new Development Agenda brings to the forefront issues that were not initially catered by the MDGs. These include equality, energy, sustainable patterns of production and consumption, and industrialization, essential variables in Latin America's path towards achieving its structural change, increasing competitiveness in a less favourable global context, and a greater integration at the regional level. These issues open renewed cooperation opportunities with our extra regional political partners.

The areas of potential joint work on the Sustainable Development Agenda between Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union are diverse and motivating. They include a vast number of issues such as industrial development, technology transfer, innovation and competitiveness, growth patterns with low carbon intensity, and a special emphasis on SMEs<sup>2</sup>, which are key actors towards achieving the regional structural change. As part of this cooperation, it is central for the region to collaborate on

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<sup>2</sup> See CEPAL- EU-LAC Foundation (2015) "Reinforcing production cooperation and dialogue spaces: the role of SMEs" [http://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/38243/S1500521\\_en.pdf?sequence=1](http://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/38243/S1500521_en.pdf?sequence=1)

topics such as financial issues, capacity building, quality foreign direct investment, trade relations, technology transfer, physical and institutional infrastructure, productive articulation, and climate change effects mitigation, among others.

The new Agenda is legitimately ambitious and its effective deployment entails the commitment of abundant resources. The new Agenda opens opportunities to imagine new and creative cooperation forms at the international and inter-regional level, where triangular cooperation between the EU and the countries of the region can play a relevant role.

As most nations in our region are considered middle-income countries, those with the highest degree of industrialization, such as Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Chile, have evolved from being aid recipient countries to supply cooperation to their neighbours in Central America and the Caribbean, which offer knowledge exchange, technical assistance, best practices for strengthening management capabilities, and transfers of systems, processes and technologies.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the implementation of the new Agenda, Latin America and the Caribbean should seek to strengthen the commercial, financial and technological cooperation as a new form of strategic partnership between the middle-income countries in the region and the European Union's middle-income countries.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See CEPAL (2012), "Estudio sobre la cooperación en el Acuerdo Global México – Unión Europea" [http://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/3992/S1200581\\_es.pdf?sequence=1](http://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/3992/S1200581_es.pdf?sequence=1)

<sup>4</sup> See CEPAL (2015), "Informe del Comité de Expertos Gubernamentales De Alto Nivel (CEGAN). Vigésimo Período de Sesiones. Consulta Regional de América Latina y el Caribe sobre Financiamiento del Desarrollo" [http://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/events/files/15-00307\\_informe\\_consulta\\_regional\\_ffd.pdf](http://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/events/files/15-00307_informe_consulta_regional_ffd.pdf)

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This is a translation of the responsibility of the EU-LAC Foundation; to read the original version in Spanish please follow the link:

[http://eulacfoundation.org/es/system/files/Alicia%20Barcena\\_Post2015Agenda\\_ES.pdf](http://eulacfoundation.org/es/system/files/Alicia%20Barcena_Post2015Agenda_ES.pdf)