

China's Propositions and Recommendations on the Post-2015 Agenda

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With the MDGs coming to the end by 2015, the discussions about the Post-2015 Development Agenda in the international world are becoming more and more vigorous. Many national governments, research institutes, NGOs, as well as international organizations represented by the UN have attached great importance to this. A large number of research projects, seminars and workshops have been organized and have produced many important reports. Among the heated discussions, however, China looks indifferent and quiet. It seems as though the Chinese government has not paid much attention to the Post-2015 Agenda, nor has it become actively involved in the discussions in the UN system either. The research and debates among the Chinese academia is also very limited. In September 2013, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China released *China's Position Paper on the Development Agenda beyond 2015*¹. The position stated in the Paper is conservative, positioning China more as a developing country keen on realizing its own development and avoiding any direct response to some focal dispute points in the international world.

The author suggests that China, as one of the permanent members of the UN, the largest developing country in the world as well as the largest South-South cooperation provider, should attach greater importance to and participate more actively and effectively in the negotiations and formulations of the Post-2015 Agenda, so as to better reflect and protect its own interests as well as the broader interests of other developing countries.

First of all, the Post-2015 Agenda will guide the development direction of the developing countries and international development cooperation in the next 15 years or even longer. It will also exert great impact on China's domestic development and foreign policies. Thus, the Chinese government needs to pay careful attention to the emerging Agenda.

In fact, the Chinese government had not paid much attention to the MDGs either. Even though China has reached the goals in reduction of poverty, hunger and infant mortality ahead of time, this is not the results under the guidance of MDGs, but more the achievements of China's own development plans. However, compared with 15 years ago when the MDGs were put forward, both the Chinese domestic and international situation have changed significantly. China has become the world's second largest economy from the sixth in 2000, and turned into a middle-income country from a low-income country. How to stride over "the middle-income trap", achieve economic transition and upgrade and sustain development will be the key tasks for China in the middle and long term. Together with its economic development, China's foreign aid volume tended to grow rapidly, averaging 29.4% from 2004 to 2009.²The total aid amount reached RMB 89.34 billion yuan during 2010 to 2012³, which accounted for 35% of the aggregate in the past 60 years. The international world has shown increasingly high expectations on China's economic development and its international responsibilities. No matter if it has the willingness or not, China has been pushed to the center of the international arena. The international world is paying great attention to China, and China needs to, in response, participate actively in the discussions of the hot international issues, and state its opinion and position clearly to demonstrate its responsibilities and influences as a big country.

The Post-2015 Agenda will be implemented under the framework of the UN after discussions, negotiations and agreements among the member countries. It will become the guideline for international development cooperation in the next 15 to 20 years. For China, its status as a developing country will not change in the coming few years. However, compared with 15 years ago, China will have to face more attention and public pressure from the international world on whether it can achieve the goals set in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. This will certainly influence China's domestic development policies. Meanwhile, with the increase of its international responsibility, China also needs to consider how to assist other developing countries under the guidance of the Post-2015 Agenda for common development. Even if the impact of the Post-2015 Agenda on China is not so great, it is at least very important. The Chinese government should pay attention to this rather than passively get involved in the discussions, and should take it as a good opportunity to have a voice and actively participate in rule-making for international development.

Secondly, the Chinese government should make a more positive statement on the key issues of the Post-2015 Agenda.

Currently, the Post-2015 Agenda has progressed from the stage of open consultations and discussions to the stage of building up agenda goals and indicators and negotiations among governments. In May 2014, the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals of UN Conference announced the latest proposed goals and indicators for 16 areas, covering 140 indicators, attached with a list of the initiating countries⁴. Among them, China, Indonesia and Kazakhstan, as a joint team, put forward a total of 31 indicators. Obviously, compared to the Millennium Development Goals, 16 focus areas and 140 indicators

1 http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/11078984.shtml
3 <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/ndhf/2014/Document/1375014/1375014.htm>

2 <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/ndhf/2011/Document/896982/896982.htm>
4 http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/3686WorkingDoc_0205_additional supporters.pdf

seem to be too many and needs to be reduced or integrated through further negotiations among the relevant countries. So many focus areas and specific indicators are, in fact, a reflection that the countries concerned have not yet reached an agreement on the standpoints of some core issues.

Combined with *China's Position Paper on the Development Agenda beyond 2015* and the statements of Chinese representative at the United Nations Conference, China is mainly concerned about two issues: Should we combine the poverty reduction-based post-Millennium Development Goals with sustainable development? Should the global partnership go beyond the boundaries of the North and South?

In this position paper, it was made clear that the Chinese government feels that the eradication of poverty and the promotion of development should continue to be at the core of the Post-2015 Agenda, and stressed that we need to adhere to the principles of continuity and forward-lookingness. In fact, China hopes the Post-2015 Agenda will continue to focus on the core issues of the Millennium Development Goals to avoid combining it with climate change and environmental protection - oriented sustainable development, on which there are still divergent views. Although China also takes it as a key area to "strengthen the construction of ecological civilization and promote sustainable development" in its position paper, China emphasizes the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" and stresses more on enhancing the consciousness of resources conservation, environmental protection and ecological development. As for the focus areas of climate change and the protection of marine resources in the index system announced by the United Nations, China did not support any specific indicators, fully indicating its cautiousness on this issue as an emerging economy under development.

In terms of global partnerships, China has always stressed that North-South cooperation is still the core and should play a main, role in financing development. The developed countries should increase efforts to aid developing countries. Meanwhile, China agrees that we should "encourage and support developing countries to continue to help each other and share development experience under the framework of South-South cooperation so as to complement the North-South cooperation and achieve common development"⁵. Obviously, China still wants to make a clear boundary between the North-South cooperation and South-South cooperation to avoid assuming too many international responsibilities. Although Chinese aid witnessed rapid growth, China does not want to be bound by specific targets.

On the whole, China's position on the Post-2015 Agenda is still cautious and conservative. From a longer-term development perspective, however, I think, China should give more consideration to the changes in its international status and the development environment in the next

15 years and, on the basis of adhering to its principles and taking full account of its ability to achieve the goals, make a more positive statement. To achieve sustainable development, China is actively changing its economic development mode, saving resources and strengthening environmental protection, and has set clear emission reduction targets. In terms of the development of global partnerships, China can also promise to increase aid to developing countries within its capacity based on actual situations. With China's economic development and the enhancement of its international status, in fact, China has been looking forward to making more contributions to and playing a more important role in dealing with international affairs. The Post-2015 Agenda is a good platform for this objective. A more positive attitude toward the Post-2015 Agenda would help China to show its image of a responsible big country to the international community.

Thirdly, the Chinese government should give full play to the role of its think tanks in the in-depth research on the Post-2015 Agenda-related issues and make relevant policy recommendations for reference.

To have a better understanding of the contents of the Post-2015 Agenda and extensively solicit feedbacks from various interest groups, the United Nations has set up the *UN High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda* to make suggestions on the framework and contents of the Post-2015 Agenda. The United States, Japan, Britain and the European Union have also conducted a lot of in-depth research relying on their think tanks to provide a reference for the governments' position and policy-making. In contrast, however, the research of China's domestic think tanks on this issue is very limited and the relevant seminars are held mainly with support of Western agencies. The Chinese government's limited participation in the Post-2015 Agenda has, to some extent, shown the lack of research and preparation for active participation, and thus the government is inclined to be defensive.

In view of this, it is necessary for the Chinese government to give full play to the role of its think tanks and carry out extensive and in-depth studies of the agenda-related issues to understand the context of the agenda, the focus of debates and the political positions of other countries and their propositions so as to provide a policy reference for China to clarify its own position. In fact, there are very limited number of experts and research institutions in China that understand well not only Chinese foreign aid policies and practices, but also the situation of international development assistance. With the continuous development of China's foreign aid and China's greater participation in international development affairs, the shortage in talents will become increasingly apparent. From a longer-term development perspective, therefore, China should strengthen the cultivation of personnel and think tanks in these areas to provide intellectual support for the country to participate in the international development affairs more actively and more effectively.

⁵ See *China's Position Paper on the Development Agenda beyond 2015*

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