# Belgium's Country Position Paper

### Proposal on behalf of the Prime Minister of Belgium, Charles Michel, and the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Development Cooperation and Digital Agenda, Alexander De Croo.

# Introduction

Belgium has a strong history of development cooperation and our government hopes that the future of development is strengthened further with the negotiations of the Post-Cotonou agreement. The international system is incredibly dynamic with 193 states furthering their goals and interests against those of others. Yet, there is often a gap between the world we live in and the world we want. It is our responsibility to ensure that the 2030 Agenda lives up to its expectations within the framework of development and that our example can truly become the best development approach in the world today.

Belgium, as part of the European Union, is proud to put the needs of other states ahead of our own through our comprehensive development programmes. But the EU must acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of previous agreements and their revisions in order to solidify an agreement that will benefit the countries in the ACP. Research within Europe and abroad, has highlighted certain areas which are in desperate need of improvement if development aid in the Post-Cotonou era will successfully implement the 2030 Agenda and improve political, social and economic conditions within the ACP.

This proposal outlines the areas of cooperation that Belgium wishes to emphasise during these negotiations which include an evaluation of the status quo in regards to the SDG's, Security and the British Exit from the European Union. In subsequent areas of this proposal, the methods by which we endeavour to deliver development are established in three sections; effectiveness, multi-party cooperation and digitisation. Lastly, the suggestions surrounding the potential framework are offered from a Belgian perspective with the priorities of our government in list form.

Belgium eagerly anticipates the negotiations next week and this government is confident that we can achieve a clear consensus surrounding the Post-Cotonou agreement that will benefit countries within the ACP by investing in areas which were neglected in previous iterations of development agreements.

# Belgium's Perspective on the Status Quo

## Sustainable Development Goals

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda more than three years ago, Belgium pledged to spare no effort in working towards realising the Sustainable Development Goals. The SDG's are a universal agenda for people, planet, prosperity and peace, to be realised in collaborative partnership where all countries, stakeholders and citizens at large have a role to play. Through our own bilateral initiatives and in combination with projects in the context of the European Trust Fund, Belgium strives to create stable, prosperous, economic communities which in turn are sustainable and peaceful.

## Security

The 2030 Agenda underlines the importance of peaceful and inclusive societies in order to achieve development policy outcomes via a rights-based approach. The respect and promotion of human rights remains one of Belgium's top priorities and supporting security sector actors in third countries in a conflict prevention, crisis management or stabilisation context is essential to ensure appropriate conditions for poverty eradication and development. Underinvestment in fragile and least developed countries is a contributing factor to irregular migration and Belgium has shown a strong commitment to stabilisation of developing countries through increased humanitarian aid programmes.

## British Exit from the European Union

Belgium, like all Member States are unsure what the future impacts of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union will be. Nevertheless, Belgium is committed to the final negotiations toward a peaceful exit. However, Member States acknowledge the contributions of the United Kingdom and the future exit presents a unique challenge towards development aid funding. Belgium aspires to strengthen diplomatic cooperation with the United Kingdom through a European Development Dialogue initiative, specialising in a bilateral aid partnership. Belgium has a unique border management and security cooperation arrangement with the United Kingdom and both parties are hopeful this may continue.

# Belgium's Perspective on Delivering Development

## Aid Effectiveness

Aid effectiveness is increased with a greater emphasis on transparency, coordinated use and improvement of systems in developing countries, cooperation with the private sector, intensifying cooperation with civil society, and policy coherence. Belgium, along with the International Committee of the Red Cross, has worked to develop a financing tool, Humanitarian Impact Bonds (HIBs), to bring together classic donors and private investors to invest in regions affected by conflicts and violence. Wider use of this financing tool by other member states would strengthen the critical link between development and investment.

## Governmental Cooperation, Humanitarian Action, and Multilateral Cooperation

Belgium places a strong emphasis on governmental cooperation with partner countries. Belgium has also placed added emphasis on humanitarian programmes in recent years. Belgium feels that by prioritising bilateral governmental cooperation and humanitarian action, we can have a greater impact and delivered programmes will be of greater value. Belgium is still committed to multilateral cooperation and contributes to the European Development Fund and Bank, the World Bank, and regional development banks.

## Digitalization for Development

Belgium believes that European development policy needs to give a much more significant role to digital technology. Belgium's *Digital for Development* (D4D) can provide an example of how new technologies and big data analysis can have a significant effect in the field of development cooperation. Inclusion of digitisation for development strategies are a key priority for Belgium.

An example of this is the Dimitra Project. Dimitra Clubs to empower women, using digital devices The Dimitra project is currently funded through the Multi-Partner Support Mechanisms and it contributes to poverty reduction, supporting new areas of work and stimulating innovation through Dimitra Clubs. The clubs facilitate the access to information and behavioural changes in gender relations/roles, including nutrition and agriculture. Using digital solar radio and mobile phones, the Dimitra Clubs are a good practice for socio-economic empowerment, gender equality, community mobilization and dialogue. There are 1 500 Dimitra Clubs directly involving more than 350 000 people (two thirds of whom are women) in Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, the Niger and Senegal.

# Framework Proposals

## EU-ACP Post-Cotonou Relationship

In a Joint Communication released by the European Parliament and European Council, the preferred post-Cotonou relationship with the ACP has already been identified. This will consist of an overarching agreement including a 'roof' listing common values, principles and interests and identifying general principles and avenues for cooperation in the international arena, and three partnerships setting region-specific priorities and actions to implement respectively in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

The Belgian government prefers that the umbrella structure of the future accord will be as flexible as possible. Furthermore, it will be necessary to ensure that the acquis in the field of human rights, good governance and the rule of law is maintained.

The Belgian government feels it is important that the African pillar, especially, remains strong. Belgium's own development aid places a focus on Africa, in particular, Sub-Saharan Africa. The population of the African region is on the verge of surpassing 1.1 billion people and, within Africa, there are 33 of the world's LDCs. Problems of development in Africa are not going to go away on their own and it is imperative that these are addressed bilaterally and multilaterally. This needs to be considered in the budgetisation of the European Development Fund.

Belgium proposes that the Post-Cotonou Agreements attempt to contain the following:

1. Special attention paid to states within the ACP-grouping that are:
   1. Fragile States
   2. Least Developed Countries
   3. States suffering large and sustained humanitarian, conflict or natural disaster crises.
2. Further encouragement of investment in ACP states through multi-stakeholder partnerships
3. Increased involvement of the private sector in relation to economic, sustainable development.
4. Acknowledgement that technology should be utilised as a significant driver for change in development.

## Parallel Frameworks

The Belgian government believes that the status quo of parallel frameworks is satisfactory. The post-Cotonou agreement should continue to be an agreement between the EU and the ACP grouping. However, there should still be additional agreements with other LDCs and fragile states not included in the ACP grouping e.g. the ‘Everything but Arms’ agreement.

# Closing statement

Belgium is committed to pioneering a new era of development within the European Union. Best practices learnt from Belgium's own international development policy provide examples and strategies for new European development policy: the SDGs can and should be used to drive the development agenda, the private sector and civil society are critical when engaging with developing states, particularly the least developed and most fragile, and technology and digitalisation should be used as drivers for change in developing countries. The Post-Cotonou relationship between the EU and the ACP, as well as other parallel development initiatives, need to reflect and respond to this changing development context.