EVALUATION DEPARTMENT

Norad

A Coherent Future?
Towards Coherent Norwegian Policies for Global Development

Norwegian governments have repeatedly expressed their commitment to ensuring a coherent policy for development. A commitment was first made in the Government White Paper 35 (2003-2004) "Fighting Poverty Together – A Coherent Policy for Development", and most recently in White Paper 25 (2016-2017) "Common Responsibility for Common Future". Furthermore, commitment to ensuring policy coherence for development was stated in the 2013 "Sundvolden Declaration", which constituted the political platform of present Prime Minister Erna Solberg's first government, and re-stated in the "Jeløya Platform", the political declaration of the present government.

Along with all other UN member states, Norway has also committed to *"pursue policy coherence and an enabling environment for sustainable development at all levels and by all sectors"* through the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include a specific target (17:14) which addresses the need for "enhanced policy coherence for sustainable development".

In addition to revitalizing the concept of Policy Coherence for Development and highlighting its importance for achieving global development, the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs have also sharpened the ambition for policy coherence. While Policy Coherence for Development prior to the Agenda 2030 was defined by OECD as "ensuring that policies do not harm and where possible contribute to international development objectives", the new definition introduced with the Agenda puts all emphasis on creating synergies between policy areas in order to reach development objectives[1]. Hence, commitments to ensuring policy coherence for development in the era of Agenda 2030 imply that a proactive system of mechanisms ensuring coherence must be in place.

This evaluation brief discusses how the Norwegian system[2] for securing policy coherence for development meets these requirements today, and how the system can be made fit to meet the requirements in the future.

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1   Defined by OECD as: "the systematic promotion of mutually reinforcing policy actions across government departments and agencies creating synergies towards achieving the agreed objectives."

2   «System» in this respect refers to all initiatives, measures and mechanisms, formal and informal, that are established to ensure policy coherence for development, and the way these function together for the purpose.

THE PRESENT SYSTEM'S ABILITY TO ENSURE COHERENCE

According to the OECD, an effective system for ensuring policy coherence for development must contain three main "building blocks": 1) stated commitments at highest political level to work for coherence; 2) policy coordination and established mechanisms that convert the commitments into practice; and 3) a monitoring and reporting system that tracks progress and provide lessons for achieving coherence[3].

Certain elements of these building blocks have been in place in Norway for quite some time, i.e. formal and informal mechanisms. Clear political commitments have been stated since 2003; a focal unit for coordinating the government's work towards policy coherence for development has been operational in the MFA since 2010; and a reporting mechanism from the government to the parliament (Storting) on policy coherence for development has been in operation since 2011 in the form of an annual report. More recently, the government has also re-introduced a separate Minister of Development, and has launched a Policy Coherence Forum.

Beyond these structural mechanisms, Norway's system for ensuring policy coherence for development has mainly been characterized by informal initiatives and mechanisms, such as discussions, cooperation and consultation in inter-ministerial working groups and committees among the ministries. A common feature of these initiatives is that they have mainly been established as a response to sector-specific incoherencies perceived in retrospect, and not resulted from political or bureaucratic foresight seeking to ensure overall policy coherence as such.

The general experience with the present mechanisms and practices for ensuring policy coherence for development is that they have been partially effective in addressing policy incoherencies within separate policy areas and sectors. However, the majority of the mechanisms have been established to deal with incoherencies ex-post and to mitigate reported harm within specific sectors. In other words, the current system is basically reactive and incapable of dealing with "structural" dilemmas across sectors, and related to core Norwegian policy interests. These dilemmas include: Norway's dependency on petroleum production and the objective of halting global climate change; protecting Norwegian agriculture and rural settlement and to increase imports from low- and medium-income

countries; and upholding Norwegian security interests and advancing human rights.

Initiated by civil society, media and government itself, debates over these dilemmas have been re-occurring over a long period seemingly without much significant development. One example of a reoccurring debate over such structural dilemmas is the debate between Norwegian investments and business interests abroad, and the national interests of the recipient countries. The core of this debate is whether too many requirement for responsible business conduct undermines the willingness and ability of investors and companies to do business in developing countries, and thus reduces the opportunities for development in these countries. The recent debate on the role and policies of Norfund illustrates that there are still important structural dilemmas in need of being addressed[4].

HOW TO MAKE THE SYSTEM FIT FOR THE FUTURE?

As mentioned, certain elements of the main building block for ensuring policy coherence for development have been in place for some time already. However, it is also clear that these initiatives and mechanisms are insufficient

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3   OECD (2009). Building Blocks For Policy Coherence For Development.
https://www.oecd.org/pcd/44704030.pdf

4   https://www.bistandsaktuelt.no/nyheter/2018/brev-om-norfund/

to ensure policy coherence for development, particularly with reference to the new definition of the concept and the requirements for ensuring policy synergies for achieving agreed development goals, including the SDGs.

Experiences with the present efforts to ensure policy coherence for development show that there are in particular three main measures that may contribute to develop a system fit for the future and to meet these requirements. The first is to develop the existing mechanisms to be effective tools for their purposes, e.g. the annual reporting mechanism from the government to the parliament. The second is to introduce new mechanisms, with special emphasis on creating synergies between policy areas. The third is to develop a "culture" of awareness, understanding and involvement around the importance and prioritization of policy coherence for development, both within the government and among other actors in society.

A fundamental first step in building a system fit for the future is the last point of developing awareness and understanding of the concept of policy coherence for development and its importance with respect to achieving agreed development goals. To date, the concept of policy coherence for development and the debates around it has only been of interest

to a limited number of people. In the government in general, the awareness and understanding of the concept is low and very few people in the ministries are engaged in policy coherence issues. Within the government, debates around the concept and policy dilemmas and contradictions related to it also seem to be absent. At least, such debates are not explicitly included in reports from the government or used actively as a basis for developing strategies towards improving policy coherence for development. This includes the annual report from the government to the parliament.

A prevalent perception in the government, both at political level and among departmental officials, is that Norwegian policies are already highly coherent. This may partly explain a lack of interest in the concept – particularly with respect to addressing structural incoherencies. Another perception that seems to lie under the present Norwegian approach to dealing with policy incoherencies is that all incoherencies may be solved in a win-win manner for the parties involved, e.g. ministries or sectoral interests, - or at least without any significant sacrifice for the parties. The same attitude can be recognized in the government's approach to the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. The Agenda 2030 is generally promoted as an opportunity for growth and development for all sectors in

society, including private business, which to a large degree has embraced the SDGs as a business opportunity.

Although the overall aim of the Agenda 2030 is development for all, there are questions to be raised whether this is possible, particularly in the perspective of "growth" for all and no "sacrifice" for anyone. As with achieving policy coherence for development, the perspective of win-win for all may lead to only minor adjustments of existing policies and practices, basically with focus on avoiding harm, rather than dealing with systemic incoherencies and creating policy synergies, which may require more fundamental policy amendments and measures on the part of the government.

One way of raising awareness, understanding, and debate of the concept within the government could be to involve external actors in both existing and new mechanisms for ensuring policy coherence for development. Critical debates on dilemmas and policy incoherencies have mainly been driven by civil society organizations and some political parties. So far, there has been no particular governmental fora where structural dilemmas have been addressed.

The newly launched Policy Coherence Forum could be a tool for bringing these issues to the attention of the government and the mechanisms for ensuring coherence. Experiences from other countries show that the most sustainable systems for ensuring policy coherence for development are systems that formally involve civil society and other external actors. The Policy Coherence Forum could fill this role in the Norwegian system. The Forum could be mandated to identify existing and potential dilemmas and policy incoherencies, which in turn should be used to inform government strategies to deal with the challenges, as well as a basis for the annual reporting from the government to the parliament. It should also be considered to involve external actors in the reporting process.

Identification of existing and potential policy incoherencies is an underlying premise for establishing effective mechanisms to deal with them. In particular, there is a need to develop mechanisms that deal with cross-sectoral and -ministerial policy incoherencies, and which can create synergies between sectoral policies. The tools embedded in such mechanisms must include clear guidelines for prioritization in cases where a win-win scenario is impossible, and where sacrifices of certain interest must be made in order to achieve the agreed overarching development objective. Identification and definition of policy incoherencies should also be the underlying basis for improving the annual reporting mechanism from the government to the parliament, and a coherent monitoring system should be designed to address these incoherence's over time.

The sustainability of a system for ensuring policy coherence for development ultimately depends on people understanding and seeing the importance of the concept with respect to achieving clear and agreed goals. Building awareness, understanding and engagement in policy coherence for development in combination with developing mechanisms could minimize the need to build "top-down" mechanisms, i.e. legal systems or overarching authorities. One way of doing this is to promote a culture where sectoral ministries take ownership and are given responsibility, and feel rewarded, for coordinating policies and activities with other ministries and sectors according to overarching development goals.

Such a culture of awareness should include actors beyond the ministries responsible for development goals, such as the SDGs. It is also important to build an understanding of policy coherence for development among the general public, business actors and other actors in society, including awareness of dilemmas and trade-offs between policy areas and interests. Hence, policy coherence for development should be an integrated part of education related to the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs in public schools – in line with the ambitions in the Agenda.

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

This evaluation brief draws on an evaluation of Norwegian Efforts to Ensure Policy Coherence for Development. The evaluation was commissioned by the Evaluation Department in Norad and conducted by a team from Fafo Research Foundation in collaboration with the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO).

Purpose of the evaluation: To contribute to increased knowledge on initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other Norwegian actors to ensure policy coherence for development; to shed light on dilemmas emerging from contradictions between international development objectives and other Norwegian objectives, and; how Norwegian efforts to ensure policy coherence for development looks like at country level. Myanmar is a case study in the evaluation because an increasing number of actors, both traditional and non-traditional development actors, have engaged in the country in the recent years.

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