

High Time to be Analytical, aware of History – And Angry

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We are reading enlightening economic literature such as [Thomas Piketty, Joseph Stiglitz, Branko Milanovic, Or Deepak Nayyar](#). Or, if that's too strenuous: we stroll past shops selling 1 euro/dollar T-shirts or if we're not shoppers, the daily news carries reports on income and wealth inequality. On Youtube, we can watch a video from the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, showing how the Wal-mart owners earn in one second [what a garment worker earns in a year](#); and another one from the IDS Sussex showing how the [global care value chain works](#) or if we're internet weary or wary: our friends or relatives will tell us of lost jobs, lost incomes, or unmanageable health or education bills, while we hear on the same day about art auctions selling a simple painting for millions of dollars.

In other words, it is almost impossible not to be aware of the immense, multi-faceted poverty and income insecurity facing half the world's population, juxtaposed with enormous [100,000-fold income and wealth inequalities](#).

So, what is being done about it?

One of many processes is the MDG post 2015 debate. The Open Working Group under the "Rio plus 20" agenda just submitted their proposal on [17 Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) to the UN Secretary General. The next round of UN-based discussions will take up the MDGs; it begins in a month, and is expected to use the SDG text as one point of departure.

The SDG discussions between 30 governments and nine CSO groups were extremely tough, and the proposal they negotiated is the best achievable at this point in time, given that many government representatives are politically conservative, socially indifferent, or environmentally in denial, or if they are progressive and sensitised, get locked into bargaining stances around special group or country interests, resulting in smallest common denominator politics. The progressive community in governments and civil society fought hard and well.

So, what is the vision for the new international political, social and environmental agenda?

There are several good points in the SDG text. For instance: it moves away from anachronistic and patronising North-South thinking and sees the world and the planet as one; it understands that environmental sustainability as well as peace and democracy are integral to "development"; it accepts the need to fundamentally change consumption and production patterns, especially in the resource-gobbling higher income countries; it recognises the inequities in and between countries. Decent work and social protection are part of the agenda. Gender empowerment is a goal of its own. It recognizes that climate change and the loss of biodiversity has to be combated. The issue recognised as most pressing of all - extreme poverty – is cast as Goal One.

So, is all ok?

No, not at all. Firstly, the eradication of poverty and hunger is postponed to 2030. That means that another entire generation of children – those born between 2015 and 2030 – would be destined to grow up in absolute and relative poverty; another generation of working age persons would remain without reliable, properly remunerated incomes, work

and social security; and the current generation of seniors living in poverty would not have a dignified, restful old age. Persistent hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity remain. Even the stunting and wasting of children under 5 is not to be overcome until 2025.

And then – how is poverty defined? Extreme poverty – the type of poverty to be eradicated - is defined as \$1.25 per person per day. The second component of goal 1 is to reduce “at least by half” the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions. Currently over 2.4 billion people live in poverty – 1 billion with less than \$1.25 and 2.4 billion people on less than US \$2 ([2010 data, World Bank](#)). Halving poverty by 2030 would mean that at least 500 million people would continue to face dire income poverty. That is a slap in the face of humanity.

What to do?

A belligerent development debate committed to a just global society is needed. This debate needs to be analytical, history-aware, and angry.

Analytical: to come up with a more meaningful income poverty line. \$10 is currently the world median income, and that could be a starting point of the discussion; that would not be revolutionary, but it would start to shift the goalposts. Moreover, one needs to use the broader definitions of poverty that are available such as the [multi-dimensional poverty index](#). We need to be analytical also in remembering, and tackling, the reasons for poverty: landlessness, lack of decent employment, social exclusion, resource exploitation, destruction of the commons, inequitable structures in international trade, investment and finance.

History-aware: there are a set of social rights enshrined in the universal human rights, which have been agreed by virtually all countries: the right to a life in dignity, a right to food, to income security, to social security, and more recently a right to water and sanitation and some form of right to land. There are the agreed human rights of women, of children, of migrants, of people with disabilities, of minorities and indigenous peoples. There are core labour standards and the rights of homeworkers and domestic workers. So far, this rights-principled thinking has percolated into the current development agenda only at the fringe – it is referenced in preambles to outcome documents, but does not shape the argument.

And angry: so as to break the barriers of complacency, show that radical change is possible, and bring back a sense of urgency. [Angry in the sense of outraged](#). In light of the enormous level – and opportunity - of global wealth and productivity on the one hand, and the immeasurable social and economic injustices on the other, the poverty line needs to be set much higher, and reached much earlier, say by 2020, not 2030. Income poverty needs to be measured differently. The development agenda needs to revolutionise global value chains so that T-shirts - and all other products - are produced and sold at a fair wage and price. It needs to ensure that care work is appropriately valorised. Income and wealth inequalities must melt-down. The next development agenda should be fighting for employment and decent work and a globally universalised and fully funded social protection floor. It needs to claim and fulfil a fundamental turn-around in international agreements, be they bi-, pluri- or multilateral, to fulfill the rights of the majority of the world’s populations.

So, it needs to get back to the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Perhaps one could build on the Declaration of Santa Cruz put forward by the G77 in June 2014, and work towards “a new world order and an agenda owned by the countries of the South for the establishment of a more just, [democratic and equal system that benefits our peoples](#)” .

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