

Coalition Building

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Feminist Reflections: UNs High Level Panel Report on Post-2015 Development Agenda

On 30th May 2013, the High Level Panel (HLP) of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda launched its report. *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development* sets out 12 illustrative goals and 52 targets aimed at “ending poverty in all its forms”, ensuring “that no person – regardless of ethnicity, gender, geography, disability, race or other status – is denied universal human rights and basic economic opportunities”, and ending “hunger and ensur[ing] a basic standard of wellbeing”.

We **appreciate** the efforts undertaken in the HLP to establish the inter-linkages between social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and welcome a:

stand alone goal on “Empower girls and women and achieve gender equality”, and associated targets on eliminating violence, ending child marriage, equal rights for women to own and inherit property, and eliminate discrimination in political, economic and public life;

specific target on sexual and reproductive health and rights under the “Ensure healthy lives” goal; and

specific target on maternal mortality under the “Ensure healthy lives” goal.

However, and despite acknowledging the need for profound economic transformation, **the report fails** to:

offer the necessary transformational building blocks for a new sustainable human development agenda;

provide a transformational approach to address growing inequalities within and between countries and between women and men, as well as the root causes of poverty, including the growing feminization and intergenerational transfer of poverty;

address the current macro-economic model which perpetuates poverty and inequality;

include people who are discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity;

link existing human rights accountability mechanisms at the regional and global levels in its accountability discussion; and

address limited financing as a key barrier to advancing sustainable development, including women’s rights and gender equality.

The report also fails to include a target to reduce growing wealth inequalities, and suggests instead that this should be the decision of countries. This suggestion ignores enormous wealth inequalities between nations. It fails to acknowledge, even in the narrative, the large body of research demonstrating that neo-liberal policies of economic growth, privatization, de-regulation and reduced government spending, have increased inequalities and fueled human rights violations, particularly for women.

We welcome the report's attempt to position young people and adolescents as a cross-cutting theme by highlighting education (albeit overlooking the discussion on transition to secondary and quality education), access to health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, and job creation. However, the report opted to address these concerns from an instrumentalist approach rather than a human rights one. A sustainable development agenda must look beyond young people as beneficiaries of services and potential employees, to recognizing their roles, particularly those of young women, in political and social transformations. The report omits crucial aspects of adolescents and young people's health and rights, including the importance of access to comprehensive sexuality education, abortion, the impact of HIV and AIDS on young people, and sexual orientation and gender identity.

The report repeatedly points to the economic value in addressing human rights and sustainable development, rather than to the intrinsic value of rights enjoyment. It also mainly addresses civil and political rights and does not take economic and social rights as the ethical framework needed to set global economic policy. In fact it offers a dangerous direction in justifying the rights of corporations and businesses over people and the planet, over human rights and global public goods.

It also presents a picture of people living in poverty in developing countries in need while failing to address responsibilities of those monopolizing wealth, resources and power. The report identifies the need for more food, more funds, more growth, but fails to touch on the need for re-distribution of resources or wealth or the distortions created by pro-transnational corporate economic policies. In fact, it elevates the private sector as a preeminent sustainable development actor, and does so with fleeting reference to the importance of social and environmental standards, with business' role defined as "adopting good practices and paying fair taxes". In addition it fails to tackle the growing and daily conflicts between corporations and human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders.

We welcome the efforts of the HLP to go beyond the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in addressing situations of conflict and violence. We agree with the report that peace and good governance are not optional, but core elements of wellbeing, and that a "transformative" agenda is required to move beyond business as usual. However, for development to be sustainable rather than degenerative, more is needed. It is critical to recognize that there can be no development without disarmament and the full and equal participation of women. To overcome the violence that is built into local and global social, economic, cultural, and political structures, we need an integrated approach that strengthens a holistic understanding of peace and security for all.

New Global Partnership

The Panel proposes that the new global partnership with the responsibility for eradicating poverty and transforming economies through sustainable development include "governments",

“the business community”, and “multilateral institutions”. While other groups, including civil society, are listed, they are not highlighted here because the report itself places little emphasis on them. In fact, the report adopts and attempts to expand the neoliberal project to the extent that many proposals, including the goal of gender equality, read as mere instruments to feed into the market. This emphasis not only neglects the detrimental effects of neoliberalism on sustainable development, it consistently contradicts the international human rights framework. A genuine new global partnership would have those most marginalized, women of the global south, at the center, and ensure truly democratic processes, transparent decision making and accountability.

On Context and Trends Analyses

Given that the HLP’s report is a reference point for the post 2015 sustainable development agenda, with the potential to influence policy making through 2030, it is necessary to ask: Is the report sufficiently informed by the global trends and challenges leading to 2030? In fact, the report is remarkable for its lack of both context and trend analyses. Contextual analysis of the global economy, with reference to the effects of the financial crisis and ensuing austerity measures on inequalities would be useful for goal and target setting. For example, it mentions social protection programs without articulating the need for them during economic downturns. The report is also silent about the need for counter cyclical economic policy to ensure that minimum core human rights standards are met.

Within the context of global governance, both the rise of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and the increasing influence of the G-20, point to the growing strength of the aggregate power of these countries. However, the majority of people living in poverty now live in middle-income countries, particularly the BRICS. They have the potential to reconstruct economic narratives and influence attempts to “create a global enabling environment and catalyse long term finance” (goal 12), particularly through a development bank backed by the BRICS. These realities create opportunities and challenges for financing sustainable development.

By 2030 approximately 60% of the world’s population is projected to live in urban centers. Urbanization is on the increase in developing countries, with urban centers estimated to generate the bulk of economic growth. With increased urbanization will come migration, and in many countries, as in the past, women will make up a significant share of this migrant population searching for a better life for themselves and their families. Coupled with climate change, increasing urbanization will create challenges for ending poverty, achieving gender equality, and accessing water, food and energy and housing. It is imperative that the post 2015 sustainable development agenda is informed by such realities and trends.

On Accountability

The new global partnership will involve multiple partners and the report calls for “mutual accountability”, noting that everyone involved must be “fully accountable.” How can this happen, when “like the MDGs, they would not be binding”? The report notes that “each country is being asked what it wants to do, on a voluntary basis.” It promotes the private sector as the engine of development, while gesturing toward self-regulatory and weak systems that have failed to ensure that the private sector is accountable for environmental and human rights violations. The report also notes that **“accountability must be exercised at the right**

level: governments to their own citizens, local governments to their communities, **corporations to their shareholders**, civil society to the constituencies they represent." This contradicts and undermines the call for "mutual accountability".

In this multipolar scenario, governments and the United Nations must be honest about the limits that are imposed to hold corporations to account for violations such as land grabbing, worker exploitation and corruption. Overall, the numerous references to the private sector's key role in driving development after 2015 are very concerning, especially given the lack of commensurate safeguards to ensure that human rights are protected and promoted above private sector interests, and the lack of concrete monitoring and regulation of the private sector.

The Goals

We think that having a clear framework that is specific, measurable, time-bound and attainable is a powerful way to motivate action and mobilise resources. We appreciate the proposal to have global goals with national targets as it increases country ownership, which increases the chances of success. However, we would like to see the development of a mechanism that ensures that the national targets are sufficiently ambitious to ensure that countries are taking meaningful action.

We do not support the selection of targets from a "menu", as this could lead to difficult or unpopular areas being dropped from action, and reduces the cohesive global action tackling a particular issue. All targets and indicators must be covered at a meaningful level by all governments, even if they have the flexibility to judge their own rate of progress over time. This is especially important for sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The goals are missing critical inter-linkages, specifically in terms of women's rights and gender equality. For example, climate change is highlighted as a cross-cutting issue, but links between climate change, women and the illustrative targets intended to address aspects of climate change are not made. Targets related to energy, agriculture, transport, deforestation and food security need to articulate the inter-linkages, e.g., in terms of women's access to and control of natural resources, their role in sustainable energy solutions and capacity building, or they will not be prioritized. Similarly, women's empowerment and ensuring stable and peaceful societies are both goals, however, there are no indicators linking the two, such as inclusion of women and women's organizations in peace negotiations.

Goal 1: End Poverty

The report continues to use the discredited World Bank poverty measurement of 1.25 USD per day. This is not a poverty line but a starvation line. It measures how many people are likely to soon die of malnutrition, exposure, etc., rather than a measurement of living with dignity, which is what eradication of poverty should indicate. Higher national poverty lines can be defined nationally but the Panel has lacked the courage or ambition to draw a higher and broader global poverty line.

While the report acknowledged the importance of land to development, it focuses on security of tenure and the commercializing potential of land rather than the fact that landlessness is the largest single indicator of poverty. The report suggests an increase by "x%" the share of

[...] businesses with secure rights to land, property and other assets". The inclusion of 'businesses' can be easily distorted and enable land-grabbing and forced evictions. In addition, there is no differentiation in references to "the business community", yet disaggregation between small, medium and larger private sector entities is critical as they are not perceived or treated as the same. The report presumes a neo-liberal purpose for land which is not the experience nor aim of most small land-owners. Measuring the distribution of land and resources and aiming for more equitable distribution amongst people, rather than corporations, would be meaningful.

Goal 2: Empower Girls and Women and Achieve Gender Equality

Gender equality is an essential component of sustainable development, and we will not achieve progress on the post 2015 framework without it. While we welcome this goal we hope that more work can be done to make it meaningful. Empowering girls and women and achieving gender equality (Goal 2) cannot be accomplished in isolation from ending poverty. However Goal 1 as currently written, in part equates the right of businesses to own land with that of women and communities. As a result it effectively ignores the current practice of land grabbing, environmental degradation and displacement that occurs when corporations are able to own and control land.

The HLP is correct to highlight the target of preventing and eliminating all forms of violence against girls and women. However, the links between gender-based violence and impunity, militarization, military spending, and the prevalence of small arms must be addressed if meaningful gains are to be made. The child marriage indicator is welcomed only if the term is explicitly defined as in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Goal 4: Ensure Healthy Lives

This goal acknowledges sexual and reproductive health and rights as critical components of a healthy life and an essential component of a healthy society, however, we are concerned by the lack of specificity in the suggested target. We welcome reference in the narrative around health that "discrimination can create barriers to health services for vulnerable groups", but the lack of further discussion around supporting marginalized and key populations and providing stigma-free services is a gap.

Goal 7: Secure Sustainable Energy

The target to phase out fossil fuel subsidies is welcomed, but it is too vague and won't compel change. It should at the very least cover the eradication of subsidies to fossil fuel industries and carbon emitting multinationals.

Goal 8: Create Jobs, Sustainable Livelihoods, and Equitable Growth

The report recognizes the importance of jobs to sustainable development, but reduces labor to the value it brings to economic growth and consumption. It undermines the Decent Work agenda by creating a reduced category of "good jobs" for the developing world, with the implication being that the developed world can expect the broader decent work agenda. It notes that the concept of decent work which "recognizes and respects the rights of workers, ensures adequate social protection and social dialogue," may be too much for some developing countries and suggests a "middle ground" for them. Is the HLP saying that some workers,

simply because of their geographic location, do not deserve to have internationally agreed upon rights?

It also suggests that good jobs need to be “secure and fairly paid,” however, there is no indication of what fair pay would amount to – would that be less than 1.25 USD per day? In addition, labor market flexibility, the report notes, is required to stimulate growth, which contradicts the notion of labor security. Women are most often subjected to ‘flexible’ labor markets and the erosion of labor rights due in part to traditional gender division of labor within the household. Within this context, unpaid labor must also be addressed. This requires that unpaid work must be recognized, reduced and redistributed.

The report suggests that favorable business environments are required for entrepreneurialism, but ignores the experiences of small, women-led enterprises that are often unable to compete with foreign multinationals which are given investment incentives, such as taxes exemptions. Re-directing subsidies from multinationals to local micro-enterprises, small businesses and cooperatives would create jobs.

This goal set a target to “strengthen productive capacity by providing universal access to financial services”, which begs the question, why this emphasis? Why not investments in productive activities with the potential to generate jobs, gender-aware and context-specific skills development programs, and social protection programs – all of which generate decent jobs, sustain livelihoods and result in more equitable growth?

Goal 10: Ensure Good Governance and Effective Institutions

“Institutions,” for this goal, are defined as covering “rules, laws, and government entities, but also the informal rules of social interactions.” Given that “businesses” feature so prominently in this report, its absence in this section, for this goal is stunning. Corporations are given a free pass. A global regulatory framework set by governments to protect people from the avarice of business is essential if sustainable development is the ultimate goal, especially given that the only priority of the private sector is its profit motive. Extraterritorial obligations, as elaborated in the Maastricht Principles, should be used as the foundation for facilitating good governance in the context of the new global partnership outlined in this report.

The increased focus on civil participation and voice is welcomed, however stronger specificity is required and participation should include decision-making.

Goal 11: Ensure Stable and Peaceful Societies

It is undeniable that violations of human rights and injustice are ingredients for instability, conflict and war. Actions that ensure that people in general, and women in particular, are able to live without fear and want are key to ensuring stable and peaceful societies. Ensuring that governments are investing in and budgeting for peace and not increasing militarization are key. A target to reduce military spending and increase social spending would be of singular value. Again, the report focuses here on symptoms but not causes.

In particular, we recommend that the link between gender inequality and militarization be recognized and addressed, and that a holistic approach to the Women, Peace and Security agenda that addresses participation, prevention, protection, and relief and recovery be integrated into sustainable development efforts, including goals and indicators. There is a need

to recognize that nuclear weapons, as well as climate change, pose unprecedented threats to humanity; that arms, including small arms and light weapons, promote environmental degradation and reduce state capacity to invest in social equality and sustainable development, and fuel gender-based violence, especially against women human rights defenders; that the effects of militarism, military spending, and the arms trade erode gender equality and the realization of women's rights; and that development, peace and security require conflict prevention through women's full and equal participation and leadership, not just a "transparency revolution".

Goal 12: Create a Global Enabling Environment and Catalyze Long Term Finance

While there is a target to keep warming to 2 degrees C, there is no target for countries to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. It also fails to recognize the role and responsibility of large-scale historical emitters in contributing to climate change and its inequitable impacts (geographical, gender, economic, etc.), from which we already see the reversal of existing development gains. An enabling environment requires clear recognition of common but differentiated responsibilities in addressing climate change impacts, mitigating causes and creating the conditions for long term sustainable development.

Overall the financing goal lacks the kind of urgency and ambition that mobilized trillions of dollars to bail out banks in record time. This goal fails to recognize the sustained critique of international financial systems and the need to reform them. The 2008 crisis, and others which came before, including with Long Term Capital Management in 1998, are evidence that we need reform of the financial regulatory system, where the needs of people and not of capital are at the center, and policies are developed and goals set with a recognition that women and men do not share the same realities, and that they experience economic crises differently. Governments have an obligation to effectively regulate financial institutions and markets to prevent economic crises.

We appreciate efforts to define clear financing targets to achieve the goals, but believe the report should have given attention to *how* funding is delivered to maximize impact. Research from recent years indicate that effective financing for gender equality must move away from fragmented, short-term funding to longer term partnerships that are predictable and flexible, and provide multiyear support.

Further, the report failed to highlight the need to secure resources for the diversity of actors engaged in this work, including civil society, and among them, women's organizations and movements, who are doing some of the most impactful and innovative work in this field, holding the line on past gains, pushing for new policy and behavior changes, providing critical services, and holding governments accountable to their commitments.

While discussed in some detail in the narrative of the report, the Panel has failed to recommend sufficient substantive changes to tax systems that would ensure corporations make some contribution to sustainable development and the communities that sustain them. The report is also silent on the need for governments to mobilize the maximum available resources to meet human rights obligations and ensure the full enjoyment of economic and social rights, following principles of non-retrogression and minimum essential levels/minimum core obligations.

This goal is also delinked from several of the other articulated goals, e.g., it fails to address the need to ensure functioning supply chains or access to essential medicines as targets, as was included in Goal 8 in the MDG framework. This is a serious omission as some of the challenges to ensuring access to essential reproductive health medicines and realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights are connected to weaknesses with the financing, supply chains and health systems that deliver access to essential medicines, including reproductive health medicines.

Conclusion

In moving forward, we recommend that a human rights approach to sustainable development processes be strengthened through enhanced recognition of state obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill women's human rights and gender equality. We recommend clear regulations to ensure that economic interests are not allowed to override the greater aim of respecting human rights and promoting sustainable development. We call for a change in the current policies of international institutions that serve to entrench inequalities through neoliberal reforms that leave countries struggling to meet their sustainable development objectives.

While the HLP report is more of the same, or some would argue, MDG +, the world between 2015-2030 will be changing in many ways, including the balance of economic and political power. The Secretary General provided an opportunity for something more; it was a missed opportunity. It is now up to him and the member states to ensure that the next fifteen years post 2015 will be a time of people above profits.

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