

CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness

Response to UN Secretary-General's Synthesis Report:

The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives, and Protecting the Planet

CPDE welcomes the initial report drafted by the UN Secretary General which we believe reflects many of civil society's Key Asks¹ for a transformative global agenda. We recognise the steps the UN system has taken so far in incorporating the insights of civil society throughout the Post-2015 negotiations. Indeed, given that the document is meant to reflect the broadest possible consensus among all actors involved in these debates, the high level of ambition expressed in the synthesis report is cause for optimism.

The report recognises many of the world's crises as rooted in structural inequality, injustice, discrimination, environmental and social exploitation amid extraordinary wealth and technological progress (Pars. 11, 12). It also stresses the role of civil society in the pursuit of solutions to these problems (Pars. 78, 129). We therefore urge all development actors to live up to their commitments for a truly transformative Post-2015 Agenda and welcome the increasingly prominent role of human rights and people's participation as enablers for inclusive and sustainable development in debates about ways forward.

Nevertheless we believe that world leaders have not gone far enough beyond old paradigms. At the turn of the millennium, the inauguration of the MDGs was equally promoted as a history-changing event, but as the report itself recognises, development has at best been uneven, and much of this progress over the past three decades have come as a result of countries going *against* dominant development paradigms. Any commitment to transformative change must therefore begin with a commitment to understanding where we have failed.

Crucially, while the UNSG says many of the right things, the extent to which these aspirations are reflected by real action on the ground remains to be seen. Crucially, we fear the clustering of the original 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into only six broad goals dilutes the overall strength of the document. There is a need to ensure that whatever comes out of the Post-2015 negotiations truly goes in the direction of transformative change.

We note in particular Par. 22: "This enterprise can therefore not be business as usual."

For CPDE this means, first of all, **addressing new challenges and implementing existing commitments on aid and development effectiveness**. We welcome the recognition of the need to create a fairer international trade system, alongside stronger regulations for international finance, respect for country ownership, and space for south-south cooperation (Pars. 93, 111). We commend its appreciation for the specificities of development in the global south and the need for sensitivity toward democratic country ownership principles.

We also welcome the specific call for developed countries to meet the 0.7% target and agree to concrete timetables to meet ODA commitments, and also to ensure that the proportion of ODA going to LDCs does not decline but is increased, be better targeted, more efficient, more transparent and that leverages additional resources (Par. 79). However, we regretted that the UNSG synthesis report does not explicitly prohibit the attachment of harmful conditionalities to ODA and other forms of financing by international financial institutions and nor does it provide for binding obligations of states to meet their commitments.

¹Please see *CSO Key Asks for a Transformative Global Development Agenda*. First released in November 2014 at the Busan Monitoring Workshop in Seoul, Korea.

We believe transformative change will require far deeper changes in international financial and global governance institutions, and a pro-active reversal of the inequalities between global north and south rooted in unfair trade regimes and the imbalanced international division of labour.

Secondly the report mirrors many of our aspirations **to put human rights at the heart of development**. However language on women's rights is considerably weak, mirroring the OWG outcome document on the SDGs². Both reports provide surprisingly little attention to the centrality of advancing women's human rights for sustainable development. Clustering women and children within the category of 'people' diminishes the strong focus provided through a stand-alone goal and integrated targets. The report also weakens language on sexual reproductive health and rights.

We emphasize that the heart of the human rights-based approach should be the empowerment of people, who are not passive recipients of welfare from above but active contributors and drivers of development outcomes. Human rights encompass political and civil rights to public participation, association, peaceful assembly, and expression, as well as economic and social rights to food, water, shelter, land, and education.

In addition, while the contribution of cultural diversity to the Post-2015 agenda is recognised (Par. 35), the report is notably weak on issues surrounding indigenous peoples, whose collective rights to land and resources are repeatedly violated, often alongside violations to the natural environment. By contrast, openness to alternative social and ecological paradigms can lend support to our efforts on environmental sustainability.

Indeed major paradigm shifts are needed if we are **to promote inclusive development in all development processes**. Troublingly, the report still holds implicit assumptions about monetary prosperity and economic growth as key drivers of social development (Par. 73). We argue that overly market-oriented approaches to sustainable development and climate change mitigation are a contradiction in terms, and that transformative approaches toward people and planet entail means of implementation that break radically from the past. Much stronger language is also needed on social equity, not just in terms of inequality of opportunity, but also inequality of outcome (Par 68). Moreover, we believe inclusion is about more than enlisting the nominal participation of the marginalised and excluded (Par. 51) in governance, but their active and meaningful engagement in the *politics of change*.

'Shared prosperity' (Par. 74) should mean higher wages and living standards for people around the world, especially for those at the lower end of the social ladder, and an end to institutions, policies, and development frameworks that concentrate obscene levels of wealth at the top.

We therefore support the call to consider establishing an intergovernmental committee on tax cooperation under UN auspices (Par. 115). This was a critical suggestion in the earlier discussion in ICESDF which was unfortunately dropped in the final report. We also appreciate the strong encouragement to implement tax reforms, including financial transaction taxes (Par. 112), which is necessary for improving domestic resource mobilization for sustainable development. However, key recommendations from civil society for global corporate taxation floors and taxation on harmful industries are not recognized in the report. Recommendations still fall short of addressing the redistribution of wealth and full realization of human rights.

²A/68/L.61 - **Report** of the **Open Working Group** on Sustainable Development. Available from: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/L.61&Lang=E

Along these lines, stronger language on the private sector, regulatory mechanisms, and initiatives for corporate accountability are needed **to bring the private sector more into line with all development-effectiveness principles.**

We are pleased to see that report highlights the need to predicate private sector involvement on social/environmental accountability, and has taken up our call to ensure investment policies are in line with international standards on business and human rights, core labour standards of the ILO, and the United Nations environmental standards (Par. 105). However, it is alarming that the report still emphasises ‘the urgent action to mobilise, redirect and unlock the transformative power of trillions of dollars of private resources to deliver on sustainable development objectives, including the need for foreign direct investment (FDI) in critical sectors, such as sustainable energy, infrastructure and transportation’ (Par. 92). Again, governments are encouraged to provide incentive structures to attract investments. This, we fear will further justify the liberalization of investment in land and resources, promoting large-scale land purchases or leases, escalating land grabbing and violence, and further impoverishing rural, indigenous women. The elevated role of the private sector in development cooperation undermines the principle of international solidarity and a global partnership for development, and also further strengthens the dominance and corporate interest in the formulation of policies and operation of global markets.

We reaffirm our position that an accountability framework in the Post-2015 agenda should aim to provide the enabling conditions required for development rights to be enjoyed, particularly by the most marginalized. Those enabling environments have been identified in other processes, and therefore we welcome the report’s call for full consistency with current political commitments and existing obligations under international law (Par. 60). The Synthesis Report also recognizes the need to predicate private sector involvement on social and environmental accountability by citing the UN’s Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, core labour standards of the ILO and the UN’s environmental standards (Par. 105). We appreciate this bold commitment which has exceeded anything outlined in the SDGS=s or ICESDF reports.

However, the Synthesis Report is inconsistent in its elaboration of an accountability framework. We are concerned about the report’s recommendation for ‘mutual accountability’ that promotes ‘public-private- people partnerships’ (Par. 81). This idea was also reinforced in the call for ‘a new paradigm of accountability,’ (Par. 146) which ceases to recognise the historical responsibility of the North and shrouds the disproportion of power and conflicting goals among actors outlined in this section.

The Report acknowledges the need for stronger accountability and calls for a universal periodic review that is ‘voluntary, state-led, participatory, evidence-based, and multi-tiered process to monitor progress’ (Par. 148). The voluntary nature and nationally focused lens of this review will replicate the existing failures of states to implement existing human rights obligations at both national levels and, critically, the obligations to regulate the private sector and the extra-territorial obligations of states.

It is surprising that the report failed to refer to the resolution of the Human Rights Council to produce a binding treaty to regulate Trans-National Corporations (res no. A/HRC/26/L.22/Rev.1). As states have recognized the importance of new systems to hold the private sector to account, a new development agenda must include that obligation and institution in its work.

Global civil society has long clamoured for these objectives, and can and will play a powerful role in the shaping of a more just and equitable world. The UNSG report reflects strongly on the role of civil

society in the P2015 Agenda (Par. 78, 129). To facilitate this, we stress the need to **support an enabling environment for CSOs in accordance with international rights to further develop their full potential as independent development actors**, and to address whatever gaps exist which hinder their meaningful participation during and beyond the Post-2015 negotiations.

Finally, in the context of the need to **build inclusive partnerships for the new sustainable development goals**, the UNSG Synthesis Report clearly articulates the need to revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development based on the Millennium Declaration and Monterrey and Johannesburg commitments. We particularly welcome the call to anchor a global partnership in the ***principle of international solidarity*** that recognises that governments are the principal duty-bearers of human rights obligations and that development assistance is essentially a fulfillment of the duty of States to assist other States to fulfill global human rights obligations and address structural, globalised causes of violations and poverty. In contrast, the principle of international solidarity was nowhere to be found in the OWG document.

In sum, a sober look at the flaws of actually existing partnerships is needed to assess their merits to ensure that all actors are treated on an even playing field, and that all development actors – governments, the private sector, and civil society – are, as the report itself notes (Par. 81), held genuinely accountable to people and planet.

Ultimately, the most critical element in the Post-2015 debates are the very people whose needs, hopes, and aspirations this transformative development agenda is intended to address. We must ensure that they are placed front and centre in this agenda, and that their rights are fulfilled in all our endeavours.