

Proposal for a Stand-Alone Goal and Supporting Targets on Equality

***Initiative for Equality's* vision and priorities for the Sustainable Development Goals and the post-2015 development agenda**

A thematic position paper

31 January 2014

Introduction

Initiative for Equality (IfE) is a grassroots network advocating the adoption of sustainable social, economic and political systems and institutions that promote socioeconomic equality and equal rights to well-being, resources and a healthy environment. Our unique approach to understanding and addressing inequality begins with soliciting input from marginalized communities around the world through our global Field Hearings initiative, now with 270 partners taking input from communities in over 80 countries.

After assessing input from many of these communities and undertaking an organizational process of soliciting input, we offer the following language for a stand-alone goal and supporting targets on equality. These targets were the most widely endorsed by those participating in our call for feedback. Please note that we continue to develop additional targets, and this proposal may be subject to minor revision as we find ways to refine the language.

Summary

IfE supports the adoption of a stand-alone goal and supporting targets on equality, in addition to incorporating pro-equality concepts across the other goals and requiring disaggregated data in measuring progress towards meeting goals and targets.

We take this position because we see that social, economic and political inequalities drive many if not most of the barriers to development and sustainability. In order to meet this challenge head-on, we must focus explicitly on the role of inequalities. Needed progress towards equality can best be encouraged with a dedicated goal and explicit targets. At the same time, we recognize that this is a cross-cutting theme which touches on almost all the other goals and targets. For this reason, we also support incorporation of equality-related targets into most of the other goals. We believe that no target should be considered “met” until it is met for all segments of the population, and thus support the required use of disaggregated data for all measurements.

This position paper is focused primarily on the following priority themes and issues:

- Promoting equality, including social equity, gender equality and women
- Poverty eradication
- Employment, decent work and social protection
- Sustained and inclusive economic growth
- Macroeconomic policy questions
- Human rights

However, because the issue of inequalities is so cross-cutting, it is safe to say that virtually all the other themes are touched upon as well.

Our position

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sustainability. In order to meet this challenge head-on, we must focus explicitly on the role of inequalities. Needed progress towards equality can best be encouraged with a dedicated goal and explicit targets. At the same time, we recognize that this is a cross-cutting theme which touches on almost all the other goals and targets. For this reason, we also support incorporation of equality-related targets into most of the other goals. We believe that no target should be considered “met” until it is met for all segments of the population, and thus support the required use of disaggregated data for all measurements.

IfE’s network and constituency includes over 250 local civil society organizations in 80 countries, members of some 500 impoverished or otherwise marginalized communities with whom they consult through the Field Hearings initiative, global NGOs and research institutions that are participating in the project, individual academic researchers – many of whom are experts in economics and/or inequalities, and individual advocates for greater social, economic and political equality.

Our unique approach to understanding and addressing inequality begins with soliciting input from marginalized communities. In these Field Hearings, we ask community members what they are experiencing on a broad range of issues, including family, social, economic, political and environmental circumstances. We follow up with questions about their viewpoints on the causes and solutions to problems they describe, and priorities for action. We also ask them specific questions about how inequality works in their community.

The following proposal reflects the thinking of these community members as well as input from our other constituents and partners. Although we certainly contain a large and diverse set of perspectives, there is strong support throughout the network for a focus on economic inequality as a key driver of the other inequalities and problems, and on the need for systemic change in the institutions and policies that lead to these inequalities. We see our position as highly compatible with that of many other civil society organizations and major groups promoting goals and targets directed at various social, environmental, and development-related concerns. Where we may differ with some, either in emphasis or intent, is in our perspective that without addressing the root causes of inequalities, it will not be possible to make sufficient progress on any of the other goals or targets.

Goals and Targets

Proposed Stand-alone Goal:

Minimize social, economic and political inequalities within and between societies.

Proposed Top-priority Targets

The share of national income going to the richest 10% of the population will be reduced to not more than 5 times larger than the share going to the poorest 10% of the population.

Every person will have access to decent work, compensated at a level that allows all basic human needs for the family to be met.

Ensure universal access to basic guarantees of social protection, including access to health care, education, housing and sanitation.

Eradicate poverty as defined globally (income under \$2 per day) and in each country (variable).

Land, water, energy, and other resources that support human well-being will be accessible by all persons through equitable allocation or public ownership.

Ensure food sovereignty and adequate safe, nutritious food for all, including support for small-scale farmers, women producers and workers, and secure access to the land, water, soils, seeds, biodiversity and other resources upon which food security depends, as well as to needed finance and infrastructure.

Every person will have access to influencing decision-making on economic and social benefits policy, as well as fundamental decisions within their place of work.

Ensure that all people have equitable access to democratic participation in decision-making, political and civil rights, information, and justice, providing good governance based on accountability, transparency, and rule of law.

Use progressive taxation and public spending mechanisms to minimize inequality of income, assets, resources, and social capital. All taxes owed will be captured and off-shore tax havens eliminated.

Inequalities between nations will converge, not to exceed a 10-fold difference between the richest and poorest nations, for metrics including per capita income, resource use, and carbon output.

Eliminate gender inequalities in employment opportunities, income, land tenure, education, health care including reproductive health services, reproductive decision-making, and participation in governance; eliminate all forms of violence against women.

Universal and equal access to health care.

Transition to economic systems, structural approaches, and macroeconomic (fiscal and monetary) policies that generate increasing equality rather than inequalities.

Universal access to equal educational opportunities, from early childhood through higher and continuing education.

Intergenerational equity will be incorporated in all decisions regarding allocation, development and use of natural and economic resources.

Unsustainable sovereign debt (which cannot be paid off without harming human well-being) will be eliminated.

Nations hosting the development of natural resources for the benefit of the international community shall receive all economic rewards over and above reasonable costs of extraction.

Nations in the developed world will pay for their share of the burdens and costs of climate and other environmental change, calculated as their fraction of the benefits achieved through the economic activity that generated the burdens and costs.

NOTE: Additional targets are still under development on important issues including rights of those with disabilities, children and youth, intellectual property, maximum compensation levels, democratization of capital, and others.

Framework

Cross-cutting Issues

The cross-cutting theme here is inequality as a key driver of the barriers to sustainable development, and the need to move towards greater levels of equality in order to allow a more unified and collaborative approach to addressing the urgent problems facing humanity.

Placing the Position

We believe there must be an explicit stand-alone goal on equality, along with supporting targets, included in the SDGs. This is needed in order to elevate this critical issue to the degree of prominence that will stimulate urgent action by communities, nations, international institutions and societies around the world.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Many of these targets can be monitored using data that are already collected. In some cases this may require a new analysis of existing data, with different questions in mind. Other targets will require a substantial effort to develop new sources of data and information. Monitoring and evaluation of these targets is a major task requiring a very substantial commitment to prioritize meeting the targets.

Next Steps

Initiative for Equality is working to build a global movement with the capacity to promote and help move towards this goal and these targets. To that end we have put together a global structure (the *Equity & Sustainability Field Hearings* project) which allows us to reach into the poorest and most marginalized communities around the world, with the help of local partners who are familiar with the culture, language and circumstances and have built a relationship of trust with the community members. This trust is furthered by our commitment to listen respectfully to the views of community members, and to find ways to empower them to work towards their own goals in a sustained and effective way. Furthermore, this initiative, by joining global and local organizations together in collaboration with the communities most in need of development, allows the integration of community views and priorities with the expertise of some of the world's top experts on inequality, sustainable development, and community-based economic enterprises.

One key to the success of a new sustainable development paradigm is the willingness and ability to draw all communities into the national and global dialogue and decision-making processes. IfE's *Equity & Sustainability Field Hearings* initiative represents a global platform to facilitate this objective. We are committed to bringing everyone to the table in the search for solutions to the urgent problems facing humanity. We are looking for partners, both large and small, to join us in this effort.

Conclusion

The goal and targets laid out in this position paper are extraordinarily ambitious. However, they are both necessary and possible. They are necessary because without equality, there cannot be the level of unity and solidarity within and among societies that will allow us to work together to solve the urgent problems we face. They are possible because the good will and resources exist to accomplish them. The good will comes from the innately social motivations people around the world share. The economic and natural resources needed to implement the objectives are available not through additional growth and demands, but through more equitable sharing of what we already have. In other words, for greater equality, the means and the end are one and the same.

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