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Open Working Group, June 2013: Employment and Decent Work for All, Social Protection, Youth, Education and Culture, Health, and Population Dynamics

These topics are all interconnected. Access to health care, education and a job must be ensured for all – they are prerequisites for people in all corners of the world to secure a good standard of living. Throughout our discussions, we should pay attention to equality of opportunity, gender, and disability. The private sector can play a crucial role in achieving poverty eradication and sustainable development through innovation and assuming responsibility for the social and environmental effects of its activities.

Health

- To be able to achieve the highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental right. It depends on: access to strong health systems, clean water, sanitation, good nutrition, education, gender equality and a reliable income.
- Universal access to health care can help break the cycle of poverty, ill-health and unsustainable environments, especially for women, children and youth. All people irrespective of race, religion, political belief, location, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, economic or social condition should have access to quality health information, education and services.
- Any health goal in the post-2015 agenda should build on the MDGs and the unfinished agenda on maternal and child health and communicable diseases and should focus on equity, access, and emerging health issues, e.g. non-communicable diseases. Targets must be set and met for the poorest quintiles. No one should be left behind.
- Prioritizing sexual and reproductive health and rights is fundamental to the unfinished agenda. Sexual and reproductive health problems (including HIV-infection and other STI's, unwanted and very early pregnancies, unsafe abortions) have huge costs to people's health and well-being as well as to economies and public budgets. Providing sexual and reproductive health rights and education for girls is the most effective and ethical manner to manage population growth.
- The post-2015 agenda should promote and complement the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the outcomes of their review conferences.

Population dynamics

- Investments in young people's education and job opportunities and universal access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health, and assisting people to meet their caring responsibilities will enable countries to reap the rewards of the demographic dividend and permanently exit poverty to prosperity.
- Population dynamics should be determined by individuals' choices. Meeting the needs of these adolescent girls and women, through rights based, voluntary family planning services, would be one of the most effective strategies to contribute sustainable development.

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Resolving some of the challenges of population trends such as growth and decline requires individuals and families to be able to fulfill their rights and decide freely if, when, with whom and how many children to have. They must have access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, including contraceptives.

Education

A good quality education is also a fundamental right. It is an essential foundation for sustainable development and poverty reduction. Education directly improves people's lives through better health choices and helping to secure good and decent work.

- Access to good quality basic education for all should remain the post-2015 focus, with a stronger emphasis on equity (including girls and children with disability), learning outcomes (basic literacy and numeracy and skills like critical thinking and problem-solving) and the transition to post-primary education and provision of work-relevant skills for young people (vocational skills should be demand-led, employer-driven).
- But education and vocational training are not just for the young: life-long learning is also important for continued quality of life. Equally, education is not just essential to build the skills needed for work, but also to provide a solid basis of life skills.

Jobs – Productive employment and decent work

- Jobs and employment must be a high post-2015 priority. Over 80% of households that have escaped extreme poverty have done so because the head of household got a job.
- High, sustained and pro-poor economic growth, undertaken in the context of sustainable development is the most effective way to raise incomes, generate jobs and permanently lift people out of poverty. Growth must be twinned with economic transformation: shifting labour into higher productivity and more diversified uses. Quality education is needed to enable this transformation and move people into more productive jobs.
- Private enterprise provides over 90% of jobs in the developing world so conditions must be right for firms to grow and employ more people productively and sustainably. Businesses can play a crucial role in poverty eradication and sustainable development through innovation, technology and taking responsibility for social and environmental impacts.
- But jobs must also be decent: secure, safe and fairly paid. People should have the freedom to organise and participate in decisions that affect them. Promoting decent work standards helps formalise jobs in the informal sector.
- Women, youth and people with disabilities are often excluded from or discriminated in labour markets. Access to employment and career opportunities must be equal for all. Women should have the same economic rights as men - to inherit property, sign a contract, register a business and open a bank account. Stigma and discrimination are often the greatest barriers to people with disability obtaining employment - they should be supported to obtain and maintain employment. A necessary condition for these rights is an end to all forms of violence against women and girls.

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Social Protection

- Social protection can be used as part of a wider strategy for inclusive, sustainable growth to end poverty. It can guarantee a basic income and reduce barriers to accessing basic and maternal health care, nutrition, education and a healthy environment.
- Social protection systems must contribute to a government's wider priorities and accompany economic transformation. Interventions need to be tailored to the country context - considering when, why and how to use social protection systems – and we must promote equality of opportunity, first and foremost.

Youth

- Throughout our work in the OWG, we must keep in mind that young people form the largest single demographic group in many countries across the world. They are the world's greatest asset and vital for shaping and delivering the future development agenda. They bring new perspectives, fresh solutions and a high capacity for innovation.
- To fulfil their potential, we must make sure they can access education and decent jobs. There are still millions unemployed or underemployed, and hundreds of millions are still not completing primary school.
- We would like to thank Ralien Bekkers of Dutch National Youth Council for her statement on behalf of youth in our three countries and recognise the importance of youth participation in (inter)national policy-making. We note the work of the 8th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting held 15-19 April 2013 in Papua New Guinea recognised that young people should be included as key participants in, and contributors to development.