

CIDSE Stock-take on the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals

April 2014

Overview

One of the critical reasons political leaders decided to embark on developing global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was the recognition that current ambition and action on sustainable development is inadequate to meet the challenges presented by environmental science. Governments then chose to integrate the development of SDGs with the establishment of a successor framework to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), recognising that ending the global scandal of poverty and sustainable development must go hand-in-hand to succeed. It seems clear therefore that the litmus test of a credible post-2015 framework will be its ability to simultaneously ensure the needs of the poorest people are met while delivering adequate action to address fundamental environmental crises.

At Rio+20, political leaders committed themselves to establish an Open Working Group (OWG) with the mandate of developing a proposal for a set of SDGs, involving relevant stakeholders and civil society expertise.¹ The role of the OWG in building a credible post-2015 agenda must be to set a robust dual bottom line for the forthcoming intergovernmental negotiations. As an overall proposal, and under each area of action, the focus of the OWG's report must be on:

- i) Action to enable all those whose needs and rights are currently not being respected, protected or fulfilled to realise them;**
- ii) The level of collective ambition necessary to remain within safe environmental thresholds and planetary boundaries, including in particular the imperatives to remain below a further 2°C rise in average earth surface temperatures, and maintain the possibility of lower, safer limits.**

If the OWG fails to set these fundamental parameters, the post-2015 endeavour loses legitimacy as a global agenda for poverty eradication and sustainable development. The OWG has begun to engage in detailed consideration of individual goals and targets. At this important moment however CIDSE believes a number of over-arching issues must be taken into account if this work, and the outcome framework, are to deliver on this dual bottom line and respond to the considerable task it has been entrusted with.

¹ A/RES/66/288 'The Future We Want' 2012.

1. Tackle poverty as it is experienced by poor people

While the OWG has repeatedly recognised the need for a multi-dimensional approach to poverty, it has continued to focus largely on a narrow interpretation of poverty as inadequate socio-economic outcomes.² Failure to conceptualise poverty and development as it is experienced by people living in poverty is a widely acknowledged weakness of the MDGs. A wealth of research and experience underscores the critical role of empowering people living in poverty in designing, delivering and implementing their own development to achieve durable change. A truly multi-dimensional approach to poverty in a post-2015 framework must integrate the social, economic and political dimensions of poverty across all goal areas.

Much emphasis is consistently placed on the need for compelling, communicable goals. What is the purpose of ‘communicable’ goals if not to reach out to and empower poor people, to enable them to hold actors to account to commitments made in the international sphere? CIDSE believes empowerment of poor people must be at the core of the transformation all are calling for from the post-2015 agenda. If poverty eradication is truly the over-riding objective of the post-2015 framework, and all focus areas are intended to contribute to its achievement, **there must be consistent integration of a multi-dimensional poverty analysis into all areas of action.** While debates in the OWG to date suggest support for greater integration of access, quality and equality of outcomes than under the MDGs, acknowledgement of existing human rights standards, principles and related governmental obligations, which include participation and accountability, are consistently lacking. **Without acknowledging and addressing the ability of people living in poverty to claim outcomes as their rights, progress is unlikely to endure.**

Despite clear conclusions from OWG Session 6 which stated, inter alia, *‘the right to development must be clearly and centrally reflected in the post-2015 framework (..), putting people at the centre of development with poverty eradication at its core’*, and that *‘Human rights are cross-cutting and must be mainstreamed’*, the failure to apply these conclusions is evident in the often narrow approach to issues in recent OWG working documents.³ The international human rights framework provides an existing set of universal legal norms, standards and commitments with empowerment and legitimate democratic governance at its core, that can ensure a multi-dimensional approach to poverty, and on which new commitments should be built.

Recommendations to the OWG

- The OWG report should recommend the integration of a human rights-based approach within all proposed focus areas, to ensure a multi-dimensional approach to poverty eradication, and an empowering agenda for people living in poverty.

2. Shift the discourse on Sustainability

CIDSE’s vision of sustainability is founded on the principle that human beings are stewards of creation, and called to manage the earth and all its resources in a responsible way so as to pass it on to future generations. Central to this approach is that every member of society has the right to live in dignity, and in turn is responsible for the human dignity of every person, in particular the poorest and most vulnerable. The State is responsible in the first instance for the common good and safeguarding fundamental human dignity, as reflected in human rights commitments and obligations, as the cornerstone of legitimate government authority and democratic society.

² Focus Areas document issued by Open Working Group Chairs, Focus Area 1.

³ Ibid, Focus Areas 5 and 19.

In practice, the multilateral system is under-performing in terms of ensuring coherence among economic, financial, trade, environmental and social policies to promote human development and social progress (...) international rules and policies have favoured measures for market expansion over economic and social policies to achieve a pattern of globalization that benefits all countries and all people'. World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation, 2007⁴.

Today's prevalent approach to development fails to treat society, the economy and the environment equally, with social and environmental outcomes consistently compromised by perceived economic imperatives. The result has been poverty reduction dwarfed by vast increases in inequality, the breach of safe environmental thresholds, and continued degradation of finite natural resources. While the economy is essential to development, it is now more important than ever that it be explicitly constructed and managed with the primary and overriding objective of serving society within safe environmental thresholds.

It is concerning that the debate in the OWG has continually referred to sustainable development as incorporating 'in a balanced manner all three dimensions of sustainable development and their inter-linkages'⁵, without reference to how failures to do so to date will be overcome. Of equal concern is the focus of some States on 'sustained growth' as a post-2015 objective, without reference to how such a premise will take into account the lack of evidence that growth can and will be fully decoupled from environmental degradation. **A shift in the discourse on sustainable development within the post-2015 agenda is urgently needed.**

Adequacy

Commitments and actions under all relevant areas must be of adequate ambition and timeliness to ensure the worst impacts across all environmental threats can be avoided with a credible level of certainty. Debates on, for example, whether water governance or climate change should be stand-alone goals, targets, and/or mainstreamed across a framework should not distract from this imperative.

Equity

In post-2015 debates reference is frequently made to the need to deliver 'transformation' or 'transformative change'. The post-2015 agenda can and must contribute to transformation at many levels if the international community and the human family are to face up to interrelated and increasingly threatening global challenges. Among these must be a **transformation of the structural impediments and power relations that prevent people living in poverty and exclusion from influencing development decisions and processes.** Without this, while development may become 'greener', at best it will deliver precarious progress for those most in need of support, and at worst risks exacerbating rather than eradicating poverty⁶.

Failure to establish acceptable means of **sharing effort equitably** in relation to a range of sustainable development issues, from action on climate change to financing for sustainable development, continues to hinder much needed breakthroughs in multilateral negotiations.

⁴ Report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation on policy coherence, 2007. Para 604.

⁵ A/67/941 Progress report on the work of the General Assembly Open Working Group on SDGs at its first four sessions, July 2013, Para 20; Progress report on the work of the General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, February 2014, Para 19.

⁶ Perch L (2014), 'Is going green enough?', Institute for Development Studies Blog, 21 March 2014. http://www.globalisationanddevelopment.com/2014/03/is-going-green-enough.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+blogspot%2FIDSGlobalDev+%28Globalisation+and+Development%29. Accessed 24/3/2014.

Member states at the United Nations need to commit long-term political leadership, address the distortion created by lobbying from vested interests, and set aside political manoeuvring. While this is beyond the remit of the OWG alone, **the OWG must provide clear and credible parameters for the forthcoming intergovernmental negotiations on post-2015, to build trust and generate ambition in this process.**

Recommendations to the OWG

- There must be a shift in discourse in the OWG on sustainable development that recognises that the primary role of the economy is to serve societal wellbeing, in particular poverty eradication, while returning our environmental impact to within safe thresholds;
- A shift in discourse must be accompanied by the quantification of the level and time-frame of global action required to remain within, or move back to, safe environmental thresholds, under all focus areas that relate to action on environmental challenges, referencing the Precautionary Principle enshrined in the Rio Declaration and Conventions;
- The overriding objective of the post-2015 agenda to eradicate poverty must recognise the need to empower people living poverty in development decision-making at all levels.

3. Promote partnerships anchored in accountability

Partnership is a concept much referred to in the OWG, in particular with regard to ‘means of implementation’ (MoI). On the one hand there are components of a ‘global partnership’ that refer to international commitments of rich countries in relation to global poverty eradication and sustainable development, some of which were reflected in MDGs 7 and 8. On the other, many are advocating for sector-specific multi-stakeholder partnerships to deliver outcomes under proposed focus areas or goals, with a view to achieving enhanced action in a context of various constraints on financial resources.

Whether MoI are captured in a stand-alone goal or mainstreamed, CIDSE urges the OWG to articulate clearly that **the post-2015 global partnership for poverty eradication and sustainable development is first and foremost between States.** While other stakeholders, from the private sector to NGOs and the academic and scientific communities have important roles to play, governments are the primary duty bearers to deliver the positive outcomes for the people they are responsible for and accountable to through the social contract that underpins legitimate government authority.

States have a responsibility to ensure that the framework has strong accountability mechanisms built throughout, which address the role of the private sector, so that implementation takes place and delivers the outcomes the framework is meant to. This includes action at the national level, and globally where financing for development and policy coherence issues impacts on the ability of national governments to deliver. **Accountability needs to be front and centre of a post-2015 framework if ‘partnership’ in the post-2015 agenda is not to be the Achilles heel of the new framework** as it was for the MDGs. A human rights-based approach anchors partnership in the post-2015 in accountability, delineating clearly the different roles and responsibilities of stakeholders involved, as well as national and extra-territorial obligations.

Recommendations to the OWG

- Affirm that the post-2015 global partnership for poverty eradication and sustainable development is between States;
- Identify both national and extra-territorial commitments of governments for the achievement of goal areas and the framework as a whole, in clear, time-bound and measurable terms.

These should build on existing commitments that relate to obligations under the international human rights framework, including:

- Improving policy coherence for development using human rights norms, standards and obligations as the normative reference point. This will have implications for national, and where appropriate regional reform, and require realignment of IFIs and WTO mandates;
- Fulfilment of the 0.7% ODA commitment and raising urgently needed additional public finance through human rights-sensitive mechanisms that also trigger systemic changes such as Financial Transactions Taxes and carbon taxes;
- Accelerate the reform of the IFIs and WTO, the monetary and financial system;
- Put in place a fair and permanent sovereign debt work-out mechanism;
- Address inequalities in governance of development cooperation and tax cooperation at the international level;
- Address deficiencies in accountability and transparency at all levels;
- Ensure the respect, protection and strengthening of civil society space.

4. Partnership and the Private Sector

There is palpable interest, reflected in OWG debates, as well as in the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing, in approaches and instruments to encourage the participation of predominantly large, usually transnational actors within the private sector in the implementation of the SDGs and Post-2015 framework, and the future of financing for sustainable development. However, while there is enthusiasm to ‘crowd in’ the skills, know-how, finance and other technological resources brought by such actors, there is little evidence being examined, or sought, for how sustainable development impacts, efficiency gains and other benefits brought by such private sector assets, will deliver for intended beneficiaries and users rather than by shareholders' rates of profit. **A focus on ensuring positive and minimizing negative impacts will be unlikely in the absence of adequate regulation and enforcement of human rights due diligence to ensure the actions of the private sector are compatible with international human rights, labour and environmental rules and standards.**

A focus to date on large, transnational actors has also led to inadequate attention to a crucial aspect of the private sector discussion: the necessity to consider the small-scale sectors, their needs, roles and responsibilities in reinforcing the social fabric, and the local and national economies of societies.

Recommendations to the OWG

- Recommend the development of indicators of success to assess the sustainable development and human rights impacts of private sector partnerships;
- Emphasise that discussion on partnering with the private sector, and particularly in discussions of ‘unlocking private sector finance’ should include: an emphasis on the need for full transparency; a proper analysis of the process of design of projects, the allocation of contracts, the terms and conditions in each contract, resource allocation, long-terms costs, risk sharing and distribution of social, environmental and economic benefits amongst all stakeholders. This is essential to test assumptions of additionality and "value for money." Any company found to have been involved in cases of rights violations should be excluded from partnerships;
- Emphasise the importance of inclusive design processes and definition of objectives and safeguards to ensure, rather than assume good development outcomes;

- Emphasise the requirement of independent monitoring and evaluation of projects and the need for stakeholders involved to demonstrate how learnings from these evaluations is being applied before new designs and agreements are approved;
- Recommend that robust ex-ante assessments of the effectiveness of using public money to leverage private investment are in place (e.g. examining whether the private investment would have happened anyway, and if the resulting investment achieves the aims of the public institution backing it).

5. Recommendations in relation to proposed focus areas

Equality

Equality is an issue that has gained traction in the post 2015 debates. Many stakeholders argue for a self-standing goal on equality, while others suggest mainstreaming equality, e.g. by establishing the proviso that no goal or target can be met until it is met for all relevant social and income groups.

CIDSE believes **establishing equality as a priority area under a post-2015 agenda is important to provide a normative boost to the global fight against rising inequality and persistent discrimination.** This should have the impact of focussing attention and action on structural policies and systemic issues (e.g. tax, equitable access to global resources), and enhancing accountability in this area at national and global levels, for both national and extra-territorial obligations. Existing human rights obligations and principles can provide a starting point and set of minimum standards for targets relating to equality.

There are currently numerous positive suggestions for areas to be addressed such as ending structural forms of discrimination and empowering marginalised groups. However, current OWG working documents fail to integrate explicit and consistent attention to the specific needs of and differentiated impacts of action on, people living in poverty and marginalisation throughout each proposed area of action. They also do not recognise the importance of intersecting inequalities, and the need to understand the double and triple marginalisation that some individuals face owing to multiple discriminations (on the basis of gender, ethnicity, social class, disability, HIV status, etc).

CIDSE believes that equality must be afforded high priority and profile in a post-2015 framework, beyond effective mainstreaming, involving appropriate targeting and disaggregated monitoring data.

Recommendations to the OWG

- Equality should be mainstreamed across the post-2015 framework, involving at a minimum:
 - Appropriate targeting and disaggregation of monitoring data at global and national levels to capture the progress for different groups. Targeting and disaggregation should take account of the different bases and experiences of discrimination from context to context, inter-alia through bottom-up, participatory processes to identify relevant groups and grounds of discrimination;
- The OWG should recommend a stand-alone global and national goals on equality, incorporating targets to address tackling social and economic inequalities, legislative changes to protect and promote equality, and tackling discriminatory social and cultural norms;
- Address global structures that limit the ability of States to address economic inequalities, including where limitations are linked to policies and practices of other States and actors, and

international policies and practices (see relevant recommendations under section, Promoting global partnership anchored in accountability).

Gender equality and women's empowerment

It is now widely recognised that the omission of violence against women and girls (VAWG) from the MDGs was a significant gap. A stand-alone goal on advancing gender equality and empowering women in social, economic and political spheres, with the aim of eradicating gender-based violence and transforming gender relations should be agreed within a global post-2015 development agenda.

Combining a stand-alone goal and effective mainstreaming must result in **an approach that addresses structural causes of gender inequality and how it intersects with other bases for discrimination, maximising the impact of gender policies, strategies and actions and enhancing its transformative power.** This means going beyond tick-box disaggregation of gender data to recognise key areas where data might concretely change the policies adopted. Effective integration of gender must also be visible across all focus areas. Integrating a gender equality approach to infrastructure, for example, means analysing the different ways in which men and women access resources such as water and sanitation, and ensuring that provision is adequate and responsive to their needs – and that it does not place women at further risk of violence. Road and rail links increase mobility and are often associated with an increase in transactional sex. Climate change, for example, puts pressure on the availability of resources that women need and has an impact on women's time and labour, and affects women's vulnerabilities in times of migration due to climate change.

Current OWG discussions also make no specific reference to access to justice for women when this is crucial given the role that impunity plays in driving acceptability of violence against women and girls. Current working documents also fail to link gender based violence and conflict, where repressive gender norms are reinforced and women, girls and boys are often subject to heightened levels of violence, including sexual violence. Protection, prevention and holistic responses to violence in conflict are necessary, including through enforcement of accountability for perpetrators.

Existing standards and commitments provide a set of minimum norms and standards to build on: these include the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Conference on Population and Development, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the suite of UNSC Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security beginning with UNSCR 1325. VAW must be in line with the UNGA Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and the UNGA resolution on action against gender-related killing of women and girls, which acknowledges that violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace.

Action on the huge burden of unpaid care work that women are overwhelmingly responsible for is critical. Gender inequality in the distribution of unpaid care work happens at the expense of women's time, energy and availability, resulting in fewer opportunities for education, participation in decision-making, leisure and decent paid work. It also exacerbates gender stereotypes, particularly in times of economic austerity that have pushed many women into care roles as a consequence of cuts in social security. There is a need to redistribute the care work between women and men, but also within families. Furthermore, current economic models based on GDP growth do not recognise the productive and reproductive work of women that contributes to the development, reproduction, well-being and functioning of our societies.

Recommendations to the OWG

- The OWG should recommend a stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment, including sub-goals or targets at national levels that cover, at a minimum:
 - Freedom from violence against women and girls: centrality of concrete actions to eliminate fear and experience of violence against women and girls both in the domestic context (private) and as well as in times of humanitarian disasters (environmental or conflict related and displacement) ; access to justice to end impunity for violence against women and girls;
 - Equality in capabilities and resources: knowledge, access to information and education are indispensable for women's equal opportunities to access and control of resources, decent work, equal pay and health promotion;
 - Full, equal and effective participation, representation and leadership of women in all spheres of public and private life. This goes beyond numeric representation to qualitative power and influence.
- Gender mainstreaming: develop and agree specific and appropriate targets and indicators under each goal that reflect gender barriers that women and girls face and that allow to tackle the structural causes of inequalities and discrimination. This involves country level gender analyses to see how different issues impact differently on men and women, girls and boys. Intersecting inequalities must be included so that inequality and gender are seen to overlap;
- The new framework should include gender budgeting to help identify spending priorities for governments and to track resource allocation for gender equality in order to realize at least the minimum targets mentioned above;
- Unpaid care work must be recognised in statistics and policies. It needs to be incorporated into state and labour market programmes and budgeting;
- Adopt positive measures (incentives) to achieve a more balanced share of responsibility for unpaid care work, e.g. through policy measures such as adequate and appropriate lengths of parental leave for both partners, financial schemes to support people who assume care-giver roles.

Governance

Despite some scepticism and opposition, governance has penetrated post-2015 debates, not least due to clear evidence that the 'governance gap' in the MDG framework undermined progress against all goals. Indisputable advances in methodologies and tools for measuring governance and, importantly, the huge groundswell of support from the public, civil society and many governments for its inclusion have strengthened this agenda⁷. CIDSE, along with many others, believes that a separate goal on participatory and accountable governance would boost recognition of just, democratic governance as an end in itself, as well as a critical enabler for development. This should be accompanied by national and sub-national goals, and the mainstreaming of governance across all goal areas.

It is positive that, notwithstanding the erroneous suggestion in both Interim Reports of the OWG that governance was not 'goalable', there is a level of support for a stand-alone goal on governance within the OWG. Beyond this, governance must also be effectively integrated across all focus areas, including, inter-alia, the participation of people living in poverty and

⁷ In more than a third of participatory studies conducted with people living in poverty over the last twelve years direct reference was made by participants to the impacts of governance on their situation⁷. Leavy J and Howard J (2013), 'What matters most? Evidence from 84 Participatory Studies with those living with extreme poverty and marginalisation'. P.31; 'Honest and responsive government' was one of the top four priorities in the Myworld survey of more than a million people. See <http://www.myworld2015.org/?page=results>.

marginalisation in the design, implementation and review of action as noted previously, and clarity regarding responsibilities and accountability of all stakeholders.

Recommendations to the OWG

- The OWG should recommend a stand-alone global and national goals on participatory and accountable governance;
- Human rights standards and obligations should be adopted as the common reference point and set of minimum standards for these. The development of nationally relevant goals, targets and indicators should therefore reflect human rights principles, including the full and meaningful participation of people and communities living in poverty, on the margins of society or largely excluded from society.

Many national governance issues are linked to and influenced by international policies and global governance issues. This, in part, explains the reluctance of some governments to support the inclusion of commitments on national governance in a post-2015 development agenda, unless there are simultaneous commitments to address and improve these policies and global governance structures. These issues must be addressed if enhanced accountability for national governance issues are to be acceptable to many governments, and if there is to be an enabling environment for all governments to meet their national level commitments (see above under 'Promote global partnership anchored in Accountability section for related recommendations).

Climate change

The integration of climate change in the post-2015 framework is a both crucial and sensitive issue. For CIDSE it is clear that the scale of the climate crisis is such that the new sustainable development agenda must be climate-proofed, driving global action to reduce emissions, and ensuring people living in poverty are supported to build their resilience to the impacts of increasing climate variability and change. The scale of ambition under a post-2015 framework must be commensurate with the action required to stay below global agreed ceiling of the 2°C, retaining the potential to reduce this to a safer limit, ensuring coherence between existing and emerging policy frameworks under the UNFCCC. The mandate of the post-2015 framework on poverty eradication means it must send a strong clear message that people living in poverty, and their rights, must be at the centre of concern under both tracks.

Recommendations to the OWG

- Provide a strong and clear recommend on the integration of climate change action across a post-2015 framework, under all relevant areas of action, and commensurate with the action required to stay below global agreed ceiling of the 2°C, retaining the potential to reduce this to a safer limit of 1.5°C with a meaningful level of certainty;
- Develop specific and measurable climate action targets and indicators within all relevant goal areas;
- Address the inter-linkages between poverty eradication, environmental sustainability and climate change objectives, including in relation to access to water, energy and food resources. Particular attention should notably be given to the inter linkages between climate and agriculture, to ensure mitigation policies do not put pressure on small holder farmers nor on food security. As per previous recommendations, the participation of people living in poverty in the design and review of climate-proofing policies is critical to ensure future action support enhanced resilience rather than undermine it;
- Ensure that low to zero carbon approaches are promoted across all sectors;
- Given the role of access to energy in food and water security, sanitation, healthcare, education and productive activities, it is equally important to ensure poor people have access to clean, renewable and community-owned energy services and can benefit from any shift to

sustainable energy generation, especially given that greater investment in and deployment of decentralised - renewable - electricity generation is crucial to achieving universal energy access by 2030 while reaching climate-related clean and renewable energy targets;

- In relation to MoI, the OWG should acknowledge that fulfilment of existing commitments to provide additional financial support for climate action in developing countries is critical. It should acknowledge the importance of public financing for areas unlikely to attract private sector investment but which are critical for adaptation and mitigation action among poor and vulnerable communities and in marginal areas;
- The OWG should assert the potential of ending unsustainable economic and financial flows, such as fossil fuel subsidies, for action on climate change.

Conclusion

CIDSE recognises the scale of the task ahead of the OWG and political leaders, who must respond to the enormity and complexity of the social, economic, political and environmental challenges at the basis of the post-2015 agenda, and the high expectations placed on the process. CIDSE urges OWG members not to shy away from unpalatable realities and shift the focus of their work to setting a robust dual bottom line for the forthcoming intergovernmental negotiations. No longer can we stand on the shoulders of the poorest and most marginalised people to pursue an unsustainable and unjust status quo.

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April 2014