



Fit for whose purpose?

Comments by the Civil Society Reflection Group on Global Development Perspectives

The UN Secretary-General's (SG) report "*A life in dignity for all*" (A/68/202) calls for a "*new post-2015 era [...] a new vision and a responsive framework [...] a universal agenda that requires profound economic transformations and a new global partnership.*" Unfortunately that new vision and the new partnerships proposed by the SG derail our ability to meet the challenges we face today.

Misleading partnerships euphoria weakens democratic governance and global commitments

The report of the SG as well as the reports of the HLP, the SDSN and the Global Compact all feature proposals for building partnerships beyond the cooperation between governments and the commitments of States under United Nations treaties and programs. The SG's report lists some of these partnerships (paras. 63-68) and calls for a new United Nations Partnership Facility (para. 69).

Usually termed 'multi-stakeholder partnerships', these proposals build on the notion that governments will not be able to solve global problems by themselves. Seeing business as the main driver of development, the Global Compact report goes so far as to recommend the creation of 'business led' global issue platforms aligned to specific sustainability challenges. It urges Governments that the Post-2015 Agenda be designed with business engagement in mind – "*allowing for maximum alignment with corporate strategies and multi-stakeholder partnerships.*"

As the reports put partnerships among various actors in the center of development strategies, the relationship between public institutions and the corporate sector becomes embedded in the logic of the proposed agenda. Taking into account the current patterns of economic and political power, adopting these recommendations would lead to the further weakening or bypassing of public institutions and strengthening of corporate actors.

Following the line of argument from the report of the SG (paras. 53, 83 and 98) and the reports of the SG, the HLP, the SDSN and the Global Compact, one would assume that *there is no alternative* to the partnership approach. Collaborative projects including corporate actors, philanthropic foundations and some NGOs and civil society organizations are seen as pragmatic, solution-oriented, flexible, efficient and un-bureaucratic.

However, the assessments of the advantages of global partnerships are for the most part not based on thorough empirical research and lack power and interest analyses of the actors involved.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships can bring a number of risks and side effects with them that must be considered carefully in the further discussions on the Post-2015 Agenda. The following questions should be addressed:

- » **Growing influence of the corporate sector in political discourse and agenda-setting:** Do partnership initiatives allow corporations and their interest groups undue and unsupervised influence over agenda setting and political decision-making by governments?

- » **Undermining accountable and transparent multilateralism:** Will the proliferation of partnerships contribute to the continued institutional weakening of the UN system and hinder comprehensive development strategies?
- » **Weakening democratic public institutions:** If partnerships create the equivalence of equal rights among stakeholders, do they undermine the political and legal position occupied legitimately by accountable public bodies (governments and parliaments)? Given the inequality amongst participating actors, how can conflicts of interest be avoided and checks and balances amongst the participating actors be ensured?
- » **Unstable financing – a threat to the sufficient provision of public goods:** Will the funding of the Post-2015 Agenda become increasingly privatized, dependent on voluntary and unpredictable channels of financing through benevolent individuals or private philanthropic foundations? Are the financial resources committed in the existing partnership initiatives effectively increasing available resources (para. 69)? Do the financial commitments of governments constitute new and additional funding?
- » **Lack of monitoring and accountability mechanisms:** What instruments are in place to guarantee that partnerships as well as the proposed United Nations Partnership Facility will be open, transparent, and accountable?

This comment has been prepared for the Civil Society Reflection Group on Global Development Perspectives and is part of a series of reflections on the ongoing deliberations around the post-2015 agenda.

The Civil Society Reflection Group on Global Development Perspectives was established in November 2010 by Social Watch, Third World Network, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Global Policy Forum, terre des hommes and the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. It provides an informal space for in-depth discussions for civil society activists and scholars from all parts of the world to explore conventional and alternative models of development and well-being.

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