

A RED FLAG FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

The Good, Bad & Ugly

of the UN Secretary General's synthesis report, "The Road to Dignity"

What UN Member States Need to Know

Following nearly two years of High Level Panels, reports, consultations and negotiations, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has attempted to crystallise the broad array of inputs and the United Nations' Open Working Group's formulation of 17 Sustainable Development Goals into a set of 6 "essential elements": People, Planet, Partnership, Dignity, Justice and Prosperity.

The Secretary-General notes that UN member states have a "duty to act - boldly, vigorously and expeditiously - to turn reality into a life of dignity for all, leaving no one behind". His report addresses many civil society concerns, but while we congratulate the Secretary-General for not letting ambition be compromised at the altar of pragmatism and geopolitical intransigence, his report still falls short of putting in place the pillars of transformation needed to create just sustainable communities that are free from fear and want.

In March 2013, the Global Call to Action Against Poverty joined a broad cross-section of civil society representing diverse constituencies and communities around the world, including over one billion impoverished people, to issue [a 'Red Flag' to the High Level Panel on Post-2015](#) highlighting issues that must be addressed in any new sustainable development framework.

The UNSG Synthesis Report addresses some of these concerns and we must ensure that the relevant proposals (noted below) are included in the final Post-2015 framework. Yet at the same time, many of the crucial issues that we raised are not being adequately addressed by political leaders. As the members of the United Nations work to finalise the Post-2015 framework over the coming year, GCAP is obliged to raise a new Red Flag. For us to support the Sustainable Development Goals - as well as expected agreements in the areas of Financing for Development, Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change - systemic change is needed and the following ten points must be reflected in the final documents that are the focus of intergovernmental negotiations over the coming months.

1. Poverty

Articulating a goal to "end poverty in all its forms everywhere" is essential and at the heart of the SDGs. However the OWG unacceptably shifts the goalposts and the Secretary-General's synthesis report does nothing to address this. The Millennium Development Goals originally stated that extreme poverty would be eliminated by 2025. The SDGs now give countries an additional five years to meet the basic needs and rights of people everywhere. The OWG also sticks with an antiquated metric of poverty - US\$1.25 per day, unadjusted for inflation since 2005 - which is neither a poverty line nor a measure of living with dignity, but rather a starvation line that will be even more sadly outdated by 2030. If the SDGs are to end poverty, they must also specifically address the needs of marginalised and socially excluded communities, including people with disabilities.

2. Inequalities

Poverty eradication is not possible without addressing the context of obscene inequality, so we welcome the UNSG's insistence that, in the new framework, "no goal or target be considered met unless met for all social and economic groups". This simple statement will advance the effort to ensure that communities are no longer marginalised or socially excluded and that no one is left behind by virtue of their gender, age, disability, income, geography, ethnicity, sexuality, caste or religion.

GCAP also welcomes the Secretary-General's support for accessible affordable universal health care, decent employment and access to financial services for marginalised groups as well as the inclusion of a SDG to "reduce inequality within and among countries" and commitments by both the UNSG and OWG to social protection floors (Goals 1.3 and 10.4). However, the targets and indicators must be better defined and more equitable. Instead of measuring income growth of the bottom 40% vis-a-vis national averages (Goal 10.1), for example, the SDGs could also state that the post-tax income of the richest 10% be no more than the post-transfer income of the bottom 40%. The SDGs would also be stronger if there was a stand-alone goal on Social Protection.

Indicators to address inequalities between countries must also be strengthened. The SDGs should provide a framework for a progressive global fiscal policy that includes taxes on financial transactions and pollution. The UNSG Synthesis Report spends several pages discussing the need to make the UN "fit for transformation". To do this, developing country representation in global decision-making, both at the UN and in other international institutions, must be equitable.

3. Justice

GCAP welcomes the UNSG's decision to view sustainable development through the lens of Dignity and Justice. We are concerned though that the UNSG Synthesis Report's definition of 'justice' may be too narrow. At a time when women, minorities and even children are under attack across the globe, when individuals in positions of power act with impunity to take what they want regardless of the cost to others and when basic human rights are denied to billions of people on a daily basis, we must have an aspirational ambitious definition - and implementation - of Justice.

4. Private Sector

The private sector contributes to development through technological innovation, revenue generation, job creation and support for community initiatives. Yet businesses also create and exacerbate poverty and inequality through destructive corporate practices like tax evasion, bribery, union busting, inhumane and unsafe working conditions and indecent wages.

Governments and some international actors want businesses to play a larger role in development. It is not a question of philanthropy, though, but rather how companies earn their money. Business must be held to account to a triple line that includes labour relations, community and environmental impact; the UNSG Synthesis Report rightly suggests mandatory Economic Environment Social and Governance (EESG) reporting, along with 'regulatory changes that ensure that investor incentives are aligned with sustainable development goals'.

Land and Water Grabs

All too often, businesses and governments acquire land, water and other natural resources -- be it 'legally', illegally or through a corrupt process -- without the free, prior and informed consent of individuals and communities, displacing and impoverishing people in the process. This must stop.

The UNSG Synthesis Report does not address these issues and while the OWG Outcome Document simply states that by 2030, men and women should have “control over land” and “secure and equal access to land”, it fails to directly address the expropriation of land and water resources. People who are impoverished today cannot wait until 2030 for a solution.

Extractives Development Model

People living near mega-mines, oil wells and other extractive sites frequently face a loss of livelihoods and serious adverse health effects. Yet the UNSG Synthesis Report fails to address this. Words like 'extraction' and 'mining' do not appear a single time in the Secretary-General's report.

Financial support for these harmful economic activities must be eliminated, while regulations and mechanisms for redress are introduced to protect communities and force companies to clean up and pay for their messes. The SDGs must also recognise the rights of indigenous people to land for food sovereignty and ensure that economic activities do not negatively impact women, migrants, fishermen, forest dwellers, pastoralists and other marginalised communities.

5. Planetary Boundaries and Climate Change

Planetary boundaries and the rights of future generations need to be respected. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities requires that the burden of adjusting to these limits be equitably shared. The SDGs should contain clear quantifiable time-bound targets for

- global temperatures, deforestation and greenhouse emissions
- the transformation of current energy consumption patterns and the use and promotion of clean renewable energy
- developed countries to fund these transitions and compensate vulnerable climate communities.

The UNSG Synthesis Report calls for a "meaningful, universal climate agreement by the end of 2015", phasing out harmful fossil fuel subsidies and the imperative of limiting the global temperature rise to less than 2 degrees Celsius. The SDGs must include these elements as well.

6. Gender Justice

As we note in the GCAP campaign narrative "[15 Solutions for 2015](#)", women's rights are human rights. The Post 2015 framework must affirm the human rights of women and men, girls and boys and people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities to bodily integrity, guarantee sexual and reproductive rights and universal access to quality, comprehensive, integrative sexual and reproductive health services.

Recognising that 'realising women's rights remains a key challenge in all regions of the world', the UNSG Synthesis Report affirms that women must have

- access to the full range of health services
- equal access to financial services
- the right to own land and other assets

and that the Post-2015 agenda must

- ensure zero tolerance of violence against or exploitation of women and girls
- end preventable maternal deaths

While the UNSG report contains an important reference to "realise women's reproductive health and rights", it falls short of fully guaranteeing sexual and reproductive health and rights for all. The report also does not adequately address, though, the necessity of ensuring that women and girls have equal access and opportunities to education, employment and decision-making. New tools must also be created to measure unremunerated work by women in the care economy and social reproduction.

7. Economic and Financial Architecture

The current economic and financial architecture – based on unlimited growth and unsustainable production and consumption patterns - causes and perpetuates poverty. A new development paradigm should incorporate the concept of 'Buen Vivir' – the harmonic cohabitation of human beings with Mother Nature – and focus on people and planet, not profits. GDP and GNP should be replaced by metrics that also measure externalities like inequality, public health and the environment, while corporate financial reports must start measuring social and environmental impacts. The UNSG Synthesis Report notes the inadequacy of GDP, but does not make any proposals to replace it.

The SDGs must urgently reform financial and trade regimes to ensure fair trade, just sovereign debt workout mechanisms, stop illicit capital flows, eliminate tax havens and criminalise speculation that results in food crises. The new architecture should ensure gender, environmental and social justice as well as recognise that care and social reproduction are intrinsically linked with the productive economy and should therefore be fully reflected in macroeconomic policies. Financial support for all harmful economic activities must be eliminated, while solidarity economies, food justice and local agroecological systems should be promoted.

While the UNSG Synthesis Report notes the need to "vigorously implement comprehensive and adequate financial regulations in all countries", his report does not adequately address sovereign debt, Official Development Assistance or the integration of women's rights into Financing for Development. ODA commitments must be binding and represent genuine transfers without harmful conditionalities.

8. Human Rights

Poverty is a cause and consequence of human rights violations. Yet, in the name of security and the fight against terrorism, 20th Century human rights consensuses - which have been developed over six decades - are being questioned and undermined. The SDGs must be rooted in the existing international

human rights architecture and include clear commitments to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, both within and between countries.

The UNSG Synthesis Report notes that poverty, exploitation and injustice result from the "actions and omissions" of public institutions, the private sector and others "charged with protecting human rights and upholding human dignity. The UNSG appropriately writes that the Post-2015 framework must be rights-based and that companies must also respect human rights.

New global mechanisms are needed to ensure though that individuals can hold governments and the private sector to account for human rights violations. Specific attention must also be given to the rights of migrants.

9. Peace and Conflict

No society can develop in an environment of fear and insecurity. Wars and the arms trade enrich some, while impoverishing many. Fundamentalism and greed drive much of the conflict, while external forces provide arms and fuel the fighting. The UNSG Synthesis Report recognises the link between justice and safe, peaceful societies, while proclaiming that "all must be free from fear and violence, without discrimination" and that "participatory democracy, free, safe and peaceful societies are both enablers and outcomes of development."

But the report and the proposed SDGs fail on several counts, including: addressing the root issues that drive violent conflict, ensuring that perpetrators of war crimes cannot act with impunity, providing access to justice, involving women in conflict resolution, implementing the Arms Trade Treaty and ensuring that people can live in freedom and enjoy ownership and control of their own resources. And while the UNSG Synthesis Report recognises that 'large amounts of public resources are allocated to military budgets', it only does so in comparison to expenditures on research and development for public goods; the SDGs must push governments to shift resources from military budgets to social expenditures.

10. Accountability, Corruption, Data and Participation

For the SDGs to succeed, clear transparent accessible mechanisms of accountability must be created, strengthened and implemented. Commitments must be monitored and binding. Corruption – between states, within government and in the private sector – must be directly addressed. Data must be transparent, disaggregated and accessible. Accountability mechanisms must be universal, participatory and empower all people to monitor and hold governments, financial institutions, development actors and the private sector to account in order to be legitimate and effective. While good laws rest on the books in some communities, they must be implemented and enforced.

We are encouraged to see that the UNSG Synthesis Report commits to maximising transparency, information sharing, participatory monitoring and open data, "while never compromising on the obligation to protect the right to privacy".

The UNSG Synthesis Report also acknowledges that there must be "free, active and meaningful engagement of civil society". But in too many countries, civil society organisations and activists are harassed, imprisoned, threatened, subject to restrictive government regulations and even killed. Public authorities must be willing to open up and hold genuine dialogue with divergent voices and interests as

well as impoverished and excluded communities. People affected by a policy are entitled to have a voice in public decisions that affect their lives.

At a time when civic space is being restricted across the world -- especially for activists seeking political, social, economic, gender and environmental justice -- the UNSG Synthesis Report emphasises the importance of access to information, freedom of expression, assembly and association as enablers of sustainable development. It is vital that the final agenda ensures explicit recognition of these freedoms integral to civil society's existence.

Moving forward, GCAP is very concerned about the lack of a clear process for civil society engagement as UN member states move to draft and adopt the Post-2015 framework. As the UNSG notes, civil society plays a 'critical, independent role'. After three years of open and shared working, civil society's contribution should not be limited to the preliminary stages. **As the Post-2015 framework is finalised in the months ahead, there must be clear transparent channels for civil society engagement; if not, we will not accept the final outcome.**

About GCAP: The Global Call to Action Against Poverty challenges the structures and institutions that perpetuate poverty. More information at www.whiteband.org.