

Report on Beyond 2015 Conference Copenhagen, November 2014.

- Hugh Bergin

In this report I introduce the significance of the Beyond 2015 conference in Copenhagen before outlining the process over the two days, and the key messages that emerged. The main part of the report is my summary of the Beyond 2015 Copenhagen Statement which is grouped under three themes: People, Planet and Participation. That is followed with comments and observations from delegates on common themes from the conference, before finishing with some brief critiques. The conclusion sums up my impressions of the statement, and details the next steps of adopting the SDGs.

The more detailed addendum to the Beyond 2015 Copenhagen Statement '*Equality at the Core: Technical Recommendations on Equality*' is attached as an appendix.

Introduction

One of the main outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, was the agreement to develop a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs) to replace the MDGs post-2015. In September 2014 the Open Working Group (OWG) representing the UN member states, presented a list of 17 SDGs. These will be discussed over the next six months and agreed upon by the UN member states, before forming the basis of the international development agenda for the next 15 years.

Beyond 2015 is a global campaign by civil society organisations (CSOs) to influence the SDGs. The objective of the Beyond 2015 Conference was to submit a response to the list of 17 goals, and strategise for the crucial and final six months of the post-2015 negotiations. An outcome document, the Beyond 2015 Copenhagen Statement, with technical recommendations, will contribute to the upcoming intergovernmental negotiations. Participants at the conference generally were strategic staff of large and medium sized development NGOs (such as Oxfam, PLAN, Amnesty, etc) and national CSOs, policy advisors to government ministries, state development bodies, and various EU organisations.

Conference process

The post-2015 framework was examined through the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and the discussions over the 2 days focused on three themes:

People - To include Human Rights, Economy, Peace

Planet - To include Environmental sustainability, Climate change

Participation - To include Accountability, Data disaggregation, Indicators

The conference commenced with opening addresses by selected speakers articulating their vision and development priorities for the next fifteen years. This was followed by a 'stocktaking' of the 69th UN General Assembly and the post-2015 agenda which took place in September of this year. The 180 delegates were then asked to participate in eight themed discussion groups with the objective of addressing the social, economic and environmental aspects of inequality.

The second day was spent airing the contributions from each of the eight groups among all the participants, before condensing and summarising key messages. Conclusions were sent to all in the week following the conference for further comment, before a set of concise, concrete recommendations was provided in the outcome document. This Copenhagen Statement will form the basis for advocating to the UN, governments and CSOs.

Among the speakers addressing the conference were the Lead Advisor on post-2015 at UNDP; the Deputy Secretary General of the UN; Special Advisor to Secretary General of the UN; and the speaker of the Danish Parliament - candidate for President of the UN General Assembly 2015-2016.

Beyond 2015 Copenhagen Statement - Summary

Key messages from the conference:

Equality must be a foundational value underpinning the post-2015 framework. This means:

- A standalone goal on equality is essential, and must address the structural drivers of

social, economic, environmental and political inequalities, stop discriminatory laws and practices that marginalise vulnerable groups, and address inequalities between countries. In addition, a standalone goal on gender equality and the rights of all women and girls is essential. This cannot be subsumed into an overall inequality goal.

- A clear commitment that no target should be considered met unless it has been met for all, starting with the poorest and most marginalised people.
- Addressing equality in all three dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental) through all goals and targets and in all other elements of the post-2015 framework.
- Monitoring supported by disaggregated data across all relevant social groups, defined through participatory, inclusive practices.

Only if all these criteria are met will the new framework truly ‘leave no one behind’.

3. Thematic recommendations: People, Planet and Participation

3.1 People

Human rights

Equality requires an explicit **human rights based approach** mainstreamed across the post-2015 framework. Open, inclusive, transparent governance at all levels – global, regional, national and local – is crucial to realisation of human rights through the post-2015 agenda. The post-2015 process must advance gender equity and the human rights of all women and girls, referring to women and girls as agents of change, not as victims.

Economy

In order to address growing inequalities and a widening gap between rich and poor within and between countries, the economic pillar of the post-2015 agenda must contribute to a re-examination of the current reliance on sustained economic growth, which does not address inequalities, and a move towards green economies. The post-2015 agenda must therefore institute a **move away from GDP as a measure of progress** in a country **to a measure based on Well-Being**, which would reflect elements from all three pillars of

sustainable development (social, economic and environmental).

Peace

Violent conflict and insecurity fuels inequalities between individuals and groups. For this reason, peaceful societies and people's security are needed for equitable development. At the same time, **inequalities drive violent conflict and insecurity**. For example, we must acknowledge that lack of access to resources or competition over access to resources are one of the root causes of conflict and insecurity - often exacerbated by the impacts of climate change.

3.2 Planet

Environmental sustainability

Environmental degradation is often caused by **unsustainable consumption** by rich countries or wealthy demographics within a country. Unsustainable, inequitable management of natural resources and ecosystem services is a driver of inequality and environmental sustainability is a global social justice issue which must be urgently addressed.

The goals on inequality, economic growth and governance need greater integration of environmental sustainability. To achieve a world where everybody can prosper within a safe ecological space, the post-2015 agenda must support the decoupling of economic development from environmental impacts.

Climate change

Climate change, poverty eradication and sustainable development cannot be tackled as separate entities. Climate change is rapidly becoming the greatest threat to poverty eradication, impacting on multiple aspects of development and exacerbating existing inequalities. The world cannot afford a new sustainable development agenda that does not include a strong, clear human-rights based commitment to tackle climate change.

3.3 Participation

Citizen participation in the design, delivery, monitoring and accountability, including participation of marginalized peoples, will be essential to ensuring that goals are met for

everyone, and that a new model of democratic and participatory governance is followed. Only by engaging **all rights-holders throughout the process in the formulation, implementation and monitoring** of goals and targets will the post-2015 agenda succeed. Participation must be recognised as an end in itself of the post-2015 agenda, catalysing a shift to more participatory and accountable governance at all levels.

Accountability

Robust, independent and accessible monitoring and accountability mechanisms that cover all actors, including the private sector, should be put in place to scrutinise implementation. **Bottom-up approaches to accountability** are fundamental to bring in the lived experiences of those who the post-2015 agenda seeks to support. This will require open access to understandable data and information. To ensure inequality is fully addressed in monitoring and accountability, people need to know about the process and framework, and how to engage in related implementation and monitoring processes. The post-2015 agenda must be communicated in language which is conducive to accountability.

Data disaggregation

The post-2015 agenda must **prioritise the production and use of disaggregated data**. Disaggregated data will make it possible to identify the magnitude of impact of particular problems and policies on particular groups. Indicators will need to be disaggregated along social groups and by age. In many instances, a lack of capacities, proper methodology or technology hinders more comprehensive data collection.

Who sets priorities for data collection, who gathers data, and how and when it is collected reflects existing power structures. This can be partly overcome by broadening data approaches to include **qualitative data and participatory methodologies**, which responds to the priorities identified by vulnerable groups.

Indicators

Indicators need to be sufficiently ambitious, related to existing human rights obligations, and multidimensional to avoid silos. There must be a baseline of non-retrogression, non-discrimination and equality. Indicators need to track changes in social norms and attitudes and should **not be only quantitative**. They should be universal and comparable between all countries in order to monitor progress in meeting what are global targets. The process

of setting indicators should be led by technical experts combined with the expertise of civil society and those with lived expertise of poverty. The process of establishing indicators must be neither too technocratic nor too political but an expert-led process open to input from all relevant stakeholders.

Means of Implementation

Advancing the international consensus on **international financing for development** is an essential component of the realisation of the post-2015 framework. Domestic resource mobilization through progressive taxation, international cooperation and democratic creation of international rules governing finance contribute to reducing economic inequality. Financial flows from the private sector could contribute to equality if transparent, adequately regulated and respecting human rights. It will be important to **recognise shared responsibility for achieving the goals.**

Youth involvement

Young men and women and boys and girls must be recognized as **key stakeholders and equal partners** in the implementation of the SDGs. Constituting almost half of the world population, youth involvement in decision-making and implementation will be decisive achieving the aspirations of the post-2015 framework.

3. Observations on common themes

The following are condensed comments from speakers, responses from the floor, and contributions from delegates in the subgroups on common themes that emerged in the discussions.

3.1 Inequality

Why does it matter?

- *Fairness* is one of our values
- It obstructs the pursuit of human rights, of ending poverty, of social mobility, improving health, education and many other basic rights.
- Economic inequality leads to social exclusion. Inequality of access and opportunity.

Drivers

- The economic system
- Lack of progressive spending
- Regressive taxation
- Discrimination
- An imbalance in power (e.g. labour market)

- Poverty is relative, it is always a comparison - how unevenly the country's wealth is distributed.

- It must be recognised that inequality is not increasing in *every* country. The neo-liberal orthodoxy needs to be challenged. There are other models, many South American countries are bucking the trend. Brazil used to have one of the highest levels of inequality in the world but it has been steadily decreasing since President Lulas' priorities on greater social protection measures for the poorest, and the introduction of rights-based legislation.

- The question of whether equality should be mainstreamed or considered a goal? Both. Because what's not written doesn't get done. Or, "if it's just cross cutting, it just doesn't make the cut."

- 'Growth' is the priority for every government. There is a need to define 'growth' and to include environmental sustainability.

3.2 Participation

Along with Inequality, another underpinning theme in SDG recommendations was the requirement for **participation**.

- Inclusion is an important element in inequality. Inclusion is also known as 'Participation'.

- Poor countries participating internationally
- CSOs participating in policy making
- People, particularly the disenfranchised, participating in decisions

that affect their lives.

- Indigenous groups tend to exist outside CSOs and consequently outside of transnational

goals e.g. MDGs. And sometimes they actually lose out when other CSOs benefit. Which makes them even more marginalised.

- Often governments tend to do little but pay lip service to development. The SDGs can be an important tool for the marginalised who can, through CSOs, hold their government to account.

- “mention of obstacles to participation” is very important because is not enough to promote participation if we don’t affect social norms and restrictive political behavior such as patronage and political harassment against women.

- 'Participation' also includes citizens of the global North (see ‘universality’ below).

3.3 Universality

- The challenge is to put development issues, including participation, on the political agenda here in Denmark, according to Thomas Ravn-Pedersen, Head of World's Best News at Danish NGO Forum. The electorate, and accordingly the politicians, “simply don’t care”. Which is probably the case for much of the global North.

- Where (7 of the 8) MDGs were principally regarded as goals to be achieved by the global South, it is recognised the SDGs need to accept we are all in this together, and that the goals apply to all of us. “We (Denmark) are now officially the world’s ‘happiest country’. Principally because of our relatively low level of inequality, material needs met, and a sense of security. But it is at the expense of others”. We need a “framework that points the finger at us” (Marianna Haahr, CARE Denmark).

3.4 Indicators

Time was limited to pull together a blueprint “for a better world”, and there was emphasis on the need for concrete steps. An obvious one, repeatedly highlighted, was for more comprehensive and accurate indicators. Issues had to be broken down into precise indicators as opposed to general aspirations.

Indicators can be used:

- to more effectively hold governments to account
- for comparisons over time
- show facts to the public on which to base decisions and to evaluate progress towards goals. “We have the goals, we need the indicators”.

Dr Deborah Rogers, one of the moderators, offers her priorities...

We need quantitative targets that can be measured. We need targets to address the following: wealth disparities; income disparities; social protection floor (minimum basic income); elimination of structural inequalities kept in place through discriminatory laws, policies and practices; ensuring that all people are empowered to assert their interests without the barrier of illegal status; end political inequalities by ensuring that every person will have access to effectively influence public decision-making; transition to economic systems, structural approaches, and macroeconomic (fiscal and monetary) policies that generate increasing equality rather than inequalities; assist developing countries in attaining long term debt sustainability through coordinated policies aimed at fostering debt financing, debt relief and debt restructuring.

3.5 Implementation

- More national ownership than MDGs. Domestic coalitions needed.
- In discussions with government officials: they want short, to-the-point briefs.
- How to establish an enabling environment.

4. Critique of the conference

- “Revolutionaries or *Resolutionaries*?”

This phrase from one speaker to caution against “nice words but little action”. My contention is that inequality is about relationships, by definition (‘I can’t be unequal on my own’). Which means a greater emphasis on power relations. Power relations is politics. And this is universal, it applies within countries and also between them, north and south. Which means a more pronounced shift is needed in the development agenda to the more ‘relational’ or ‘political’. How this would happen is the challenge. Existing power holders (e.g. OECD countries in this case) traditionally are very resistant to any diminution of their position.

While I was not aware of any discussion during the conference on addressing power structures, it is interesting to note an addition in the amended version of the draft outcome document (OD) during the week after the conference, that “*the post-2015 framework must address structural drivers*”. The online comment that was partly included in the amended OD read...

I think that it's important to make a difference between multiple dimensions of inequality and structural drivers of inequality. For me the word “dimensions” sounds more like forms of inequality and “structural drivers” refers more to the causes of inequality than to its effects (the combination of unfair patterns of accumulation and redistribution of resources, the discriminatory social norms influencing on laws, public policies and social behaviors, the predatory economical model and the concentration of power and decision-making in few hands). To attend to these drivers should be at the core of the idea of having a stand-alone goal on inequality.

The amended objective has, however, little in the way of concrete steps on the ‘how,’ beyond the aspiration for greater participation. This is perhaps understandable as these issues were probably beyond the terms of reference for the conference. It was accepted the participants were working within the system, and so had to play by the 'system's' rules. One speaker urged CSOs to be “*critical friends*” with our government colleagues. And as another observed, “*Things are going to be happening, i.e the SDGs. The question is - are people going to get involved in influencing them or not.*” There were declarations that the ‘top down’ approach of the MDGs, relying as they do largely on economic indicators, were inadequate. And needed to be augmented by ‘bottom up’ strategy as well.

- As a participant from UNIDEV, I was disappointed to see the issue of Global Citizenship Education (Development Education) disregarded. There is a general agreement on the global North's culpability in trade inequalities, environmentally unsustainable economic growth models, and climate change. In social democracies around the world politicians are beholden to their electorate. For various reasons there is little appetite among the people - and few politicians are willing to vote for unpopular measures - to address these critical issues. Surely that is a primary argument for greater resources to be invested in raising the public awareness of development issues. globalhive.ca

Conclusion

One of the conference speakers Paul Ladd, lead advisor on the post-2015 framework at the UNDP, believed it was huge progress to have '*Inequality*' as a stated goal. He reminded delegates that the 17 SDGs were not yet agreed by the UN member states, and counseled against unpicking them (the UK position is a reduction of the number of goals and targets). Otherwise there is a real risk of losing targets such as those on governance, reproductive rights, climate change, and even inequality. "*Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good*".

Overall it appears a shift in emphasis - from poverty to inequality; towards participation; universality of goals; and environmental sustainability - means a transformational difference between SDGs and a "warmed up" MDGs.

With contributions and amendments from participants, the outcome document – the Copenhagen Statement - looks quite different from the original draft since the conference ended 14 November. The document articulates a strong, comprehensive vision for a shared future, and will be used to inform and convince governments in their negotiations over the SDGs.

John Gilroy, aide de camp to the Ireland Ambassador to the UN, addressed the conference by Skype from New York. Ireland, with Kenya, is co-facilitating negotiations culminating in the UN adopting the SDGs in September 2015. Gilroy reported on progress and said Ireland will be producing a 'roadmap' for the next 9 months negotiations. "*Keep up the heat*", he urged conference participants.

As one of the coordinators stressed, there are just 5 - 6 months to influence the SDGs! Beyond 2015 finishes in May 2015.

Hugh Bergin was invited to attend the Beyond 2015 Conference in his capacity as Acting National Coordinator Ireland for UNIDEV, a European Commission funded project to promote Development Education in the EU.

Next Steps:

- September 2014 - The Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals reported to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) with their recommended list of 17 goals.
- End of December 2014 - The UN Secretary General will synthesise all inputs, including the Beyond 2015 Outcome Document, and report to the UNGA.
- January 2015 - Intergovernmental negotiations will start
- July 2015 - International conference on financing of Development
- September 2015 - Heads of state meet for summit to agree post-2015 SDGs.