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The Post-2015 UN Development Agenda (I) – General Introduction.

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RE: THE POST-2015 UN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA, PART ONE – GENERAL INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

IIS 295 is the first in a series of four reports that will analyze the processes, already well on their way, leading to the adoption of a UN post-2015 development agenda and the challenges that this agenda, in its current formulation, confronts peoples and governments with. IIS 295 presents the various initiatives taken by the UN Secretariat to develop the new vision. They demonstrate the leadership of “multistakeholder partnerships” over intergovernmental processes in setting the new agenda. IIS 295 also offers an introductory presentation and analysis of the mandate of the **High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP) and of its recently issued report “A New Global Partnership”**. http://www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP_P2015_Report.pdf IIS 296 will analyze the “transformative shifts” advocated in the HLP’s report. IIS 297 and 298 will address the ideological (cultural, ethical, anthropological) issues of the proposed new development agenda, and IIS 299 will focus on its political challenges.

1.- SETTING THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA - HISTORICAL BACKGROUND - THE LEADERSHIP OF UN-LED PROCESSES OVER INTERGOVERNMENTAL PROCESSES

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), multilateralism’s current development framework, expire at the end of 2015.

The process of discussing the next development agenda was officially started at the 2010 High Level Plenary Meeting of the UN General Assembly, an intergovernmental event. Since then, the UN Secretariat has taken the following initiatives:

- it set up what it called a UN System Task Team [1] (UNTT), comprised of 60 UN agencies, as well as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, to define a UN “system-wide” vision for the Post-2015 Development Agenda; the UN System Task Team is co-chaired by the UN Development Program (UNDP) and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) of the UN Secretariat;

- The UN Secretary General appointed a Special Advisor on Post-2015 Development Planning: Amina J. Mohammed, who represents him in the post-2015 debate; [2]
- The UN Secretariat launched eleven multistakeholder “global thematic consultations” [3] and national consultations in over 60 countries under the leadership of the United Nations Development Group [4] (UNDG);
- The UN Secretary General launched a so-called High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons – the object of IIS 295 analysis.

A word of explanation about the word “multistakeholder” is in order before going further in this report. **“Multistakeholder” is a key word of global governance, of the post-2015 agenda-setting process**, hence of this series of IIS reports. **It refers to a plurality of actors who have a “stake” in a given agenda: next to governments, what the UN describes as “civil society” (youth, women’s groups, indigenous communities, marginalized or discriminated groups, academia, trade unions, NGOs...), and the “private sector” (businesses and foundations)**. Incidentally, let us note the UN’s exclusion of business from “civil society”; this exclusion goes back to the early 1990s and is an important feature of the UN’s redefinition of political terms such as “civil society”. To use another key word of the post-2015, multistakeholder actors are “partners” - “equal partners”. **The “stakeholders” or “partners”, IIS further remarks, are “those who participate” in setting, implementing, monitoring global governance’s development agenda.** They participate because they have a stake in this agenda **and are ideologically aligned with its secularist ethic, which binds all the “partners” together: a distinctive feature of the partners is their like-mindedness; “partnerships” are not pluralistic.**

Other UN-led multistakeholder processes will be feeding into the post-2015 discussions:

- the work of the UN General Assembly’s Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [5]. This intergovernmental process receives input from “major groups and other stakeholders”. Let us recall that the Rio+20 Summit on Sustainable Development, held in June 2012, agreed a plan to set global SDGs that would address, inter alia, “global environmental management”, protection of the oceans, improvement of “food security”, and promotion of a “green economy”. According to Amina Mohammed, the end result of Ban Ki-moon’s High-Level Panel and of the Working Group will be “one development agenda”;
- regional consultations by the UN Regional Economic Commissions, which will result in a report on “regional perspectives” on the post-2015 development agenda;
- inputs from the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, set up by the UN Secretary-General in August 2012 to support “global problem solving” in twelve areas of sustainable development; the network “mobilizes scientific and technical expertise from academia, civil society, and the private sector in support of sustainable development problem solving at local, national, and global scales”.
- inputs from businesses through the UN Global Compact.

The UN secretariat perceived a need to ensure coherence among these numerous and complex processes that, although separate, are interconnected

through a common worldview. To this end, the Secretariat put in place an informal senior coordination group of four Assistant Secretary-Generals (ASGs) [6] and established a One Secretariat [7]. Though “informal”, this Secretariat has a critical streamlining role in the process that will establish the post-2015 vision. The choices it will necessarily make (what it deems relevant to integrate in the vision, what it discards, the priorities it establishes and so on) will not be submitted to an intergovernmental control: **UN member-states will “trust” this Secretariat to produce a document that “represents” a consultation process which, let us repeat, is not primarily intergovernmental, but “multistakeholder”.**

The intergovernmental character of multilateral negotiations is what gives them democratic legitimacy: governmental delegations at the UN are supposed to “represent” their government, which in turn must by mandate represent the will of its people. In a traditional modern democracy, policies affecting citizens are debated at the national level. As multilateral processes drift away from their mandatory intergovernmental character, they also drift away from democracy and contribute to the installation of a new type of political regime at the “global” level. This regime already has a name: “global governance”. **The power shift from governments to multistakeholder processes takes place at a time when a majority of issues traditionally dealt with at the national level are now treated at the multilateral level. Global governance today has critical global policy-making influence in the areas of human rights, environment, health, education and the economy.** But most of this influence is not visible because it is exercised within and through democratic institutions, whose façade is still standing.

The initiatives tasked with producing a vision for a post-2015 development agenda are all UN-led: multistakeholder processes frame the intergovernmental process. The “partners” have the active role of consulting, building “consensus” (a consensus of like-minded actors), setting the agenda. Governmental delegations negotiate an agenda that is pre-set and do so under the unrelenting pressure of its real authors. In the past twenty years, they have overwhelmingly acquiesced, not only to the agenda, but also to the new political processes. The roles are reversed. **Governments are no longer in the driver’s seat.**

IIS observes that after over two decades of a quiet political revolution that has transformed the UN, by mandate an international and intergovernmental institution, into a so-called “global” and multistakeholder process, **the “multistakeholder” character of UN agendas is now broadly accepted as the norm. The balance of power has already tilted in favor of UN partners, to the disfavor of people and their governments.** In the view of IIS, the key challenge of the post-2015 agenda is political: it consists in decisively, irreversibly perhaps, consolidating the power of the partners.

The multistakeholder processes leading to setting the post-2015 agenda have presented themselves as broadly consultative and participatory. But their starting point has been neither the “will of the people” nor a sincere search for the good of humanity as can be universally recognized in the hearts of all human beings. Those “consulted” are part of the system of global governance as its experts and operational partners.

But the task of developing a vision for their own development belongs first and foremost to the people themselves, rooted as they are in a culture, identity and faith that ought to be respected. Development is not only nor primarily a technical and financial enterprise: the poor are the first agents of their own development, which must respect the principle of self-determination enshrined in the United Nations Charter as one of the fundamental values of the organization. This is all the more critical than the leadership that global governance’s experts, partners, High Level Panels and “eminent persons” exercise over the people is not only technical: it is also and primarily ethical. **A secular and postmodern ethic pervades “global frameworks” and is imposed on the world’s peoples**. Insofar as they passively submit to them, UN member states are complicit in the process that deconstructs their own authority and run the risk of submitting their own people to the ideology of global governance’s agenda-setters.

2.- ANALYTICAL PRESENTATION OF THE HIGH LEVEL PANEL’S MANDATE AND WORK

As has become common practice at the UN since Kofi Annan’s first mandate as Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon tasked a High-Level Panel (HLP), whose 27 members he nominated in July 2012 [8], with a mission of great import for humanity: that of developing a “vision” for the development agenda in the next decade and a half.

The mandate the HLP received from the UN Secretary General was threefold:

- making recommendations regarding “the vision and shape of a Post-2015 agenda”;
- identifying “key principles for reshaping the global partnership for development and strengthened accountability mechanisms”;
- **recommending “how to build and sustain broad political consensus on an ambitious yet achievable Post-2015 agenda around the three dimensions of economic growth, social equality and environmental sustainability”** (1). Incidentally, IIS notes the use of the word “equality” instead of the word “equity”, usually associated with sustainable development. **“Equality” has greater ideological underpinnings.**

The first part of the HLP’s mandate regards the “vision and shape” of the future development agenda - broad, undefined terms, IIS notes, which can be interpreted as referring to the content of the agenda; the second part of the mandate concerns the process through which the agenda will be enacted: what the panel’s report calls **the “global partnership principle” - a terminology which belongs to political theory and conceals a**

political revolution, a power transfer from the people to the “global partners”; the third part is a blend of content and process, the content being the agenda itself and the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development (but this content is, as we shall see, procedural – it is a process of integration) and the process, a “broad political consensus”. IIS analysis of the Panel’s report will show that **the proposed new “agenda” is much more about process than about content – a typical feature of any revolution: revolutions are more about power-grab than about a substantial platform.**

After four meetings and a consultative process described as “extensive” and “multistakeholder”, the HLP issued its report on May 30th: “A new global partnership: eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development”. IIS 298 will analyze the serious challenges that the so-called “consultative process” raises to intergovernmental and democratic control over multilateral decision-making. Although it has become a customary part of the way decisions are made at the level of global governance, **“multistakeholder consultation” does not comply with democratic legitimacy requirements, such as an open debate, effective democratic representation and submission to the will of the people, pluralism and a space for opposition.**

The Panel’s report, a 69 pages document, will serve as a “key input” to the Secretary General’s report to the special event that will be organized by the President of the 66th session of the General Assembly in September 2013 to discuss the possible contours of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. **Homi Kharas, who led the Panel’s secretariat, is the chief author of the report:** he is a key engineer of the post-2015 world vision in its current state. **He is the Deputy Director in the Global Economy and Development program at the Washington-based Brookings think tank, an institution aligned with the UN’s *postmodern* worldview.**

Experience shows that intergovernmental negotiations over agendas that had been pre-set in a High Level Panel report rarely depart from its language, themes, spirit, framework. This, IIS remarks, reflects that a small group of like-minded people, deprived of any right to legitimately “represent” the will of the people, wield effective global policy-making power. **Multilateral “frameworks” such as the MDGs do influence the course of human history: they are treated as globally normative and are implemented.** The HLP wants the new agenda to be “universally applicable and at the same time implementable at the national, sub-national, community and individual levels” (Bali

communiqué). This is indeed no small ambition: it amounts to global policy-making, and the new political regime seeks to strengthen its “accountability mechanisms”.

3.- ANALYTICAL PRESENTATION OF THE HIGH LEVEL PANEL’S REPORT

The HLP’s report is divided into five chapters. The first chapter, entitled “A vision and framework for the post-2015 Development Agenda”, is the only space granted in the document to the “vision”. But it is only at the end of the chapter, after praising the achievements of the MDGs, presenting the outcome of the multistakeholder consultative process and of the HLP’s four meetings (New-York, London, Monrovia, Bali), that the report exposes the HLP’s vision.

This vision is essentially, not about content, but about the process through which the “new consensus” built during the UN conference process of the 1990s ought to be speedily further enacted: the strengthening of “partnerships” and the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. To put it differently, the content of the “new vision” is a process of change, a series of transformations and structural changes within the economy, societies and mindsets.

The fact is that, without giving substantive content to the vision, the report immediately moves on, in chapter two, “From Vision to Action – Priority Transformations for a Post-2015 Agenda”. **The HLP’s report advocates five key transformative shifts**, phrased as attractive slogans but whose content, again, remains vague: Leave no one behind; **Put sustainable development at the core**; Transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth; Build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all; Forge a new global partnership.

Chapter three, “Illustrative Goals and Global Impact”, exposes the criteria according to which the HLP set its 12 “illustrative goals” (and 54 targets) to replace the 8 Millennium Development Goals. These illustrative goals and their targets are listed, not in the report itself, but in its annex I. Annex II concerns the “evidence of impact and explanation” of the illustrative goals. The HLP’s goals are “illustrative” and not “prescriptive”, as the HLP has no formal authority to impose them. It is likely, however, that the report the UN Secretary General will submit in September to the General Assembly will draw largely from the report’s proposals. The HLP proposes 2030 as the new target date for the realization of the 12 goals. It insists on the indivisible, interconnected character of the goals. Peace, inequality, climate change, cities, young people, girls and women, sustainable consumption and production patterns are identified as “cross-cutting issues” that are “not directly addressed through a single goal but are treated in many of them” (2, p. 16), and are therefore likely to be treated as the real priorities. Several of these issues lend themselves to ideological interpretations.

Chapter four, “Implementation, Accountability and Building Consensus”, reveals the determination of the “partners” to monitor the implementation of the non-binding goals and targets by all “stakeholders”. The HLP calls for a “data revolution”, “an independent and

rigorous monitoring system” for every single goal, a “new international initiative to improve the quality of statistics” (2, p. 21). This chapter, which will be analyzed in IIS 297, presents serious political challenges. There is a powerful trend, led by the US and some European countries (Scandinavian countries, the UK) to promote data and “statistics” as driving determinants of policy-making at all levels. But statistical studies are often conducted to push for ideological agendas.

Chapter five is one page long and contains the concluding remarks. The annexes are important: they spell out the 12 goals and targets and contain a summary of “outreach efforts” - of the “consultative process”.

4.- ABOUT THE MEMBERS OF THE HIGH LEVEL PANEL

The Panel included “representatives of governments, the private sector, academia, civil society and youth”: it was “multistakeholder”. It was chaired by three heads of states: UK Prime Minister David Cameron, Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and Indonesia President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

The members of the Panel were all like-minded (postmodern left) and part of the system, meaning that no opposition to the UN ethic and paradigms was likely to arouse within the panel. The discussions were unsurprisingly characterized by a “strong unity of purpose”. A google search reveals that a majority of the members are associated in one way or another to the “sexual and reproductive health” agenda and/or the ecofeminist agenda.

5.- THE KEY WORDS OF THE REPORT

New global partnership; transformative shifts; sustainable development; integration; poverty eradication; bold and practical; new spirit (of cooperation); single, universal post-2015 agenda; data revolution: these are some of the key words of the report, expressing its dominant themes. One concept that is notably absent from the report is the family, basic unit of society (families in the plural is used twice) and as such, key to any sound, integral human development agenda.

Sources: Sources:

- 1.- Terms of Reference for the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. July 2012.
- 2.- A New Global Partnership: eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development. The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. May 30, 2013.

[1] In June 2012, the team issued its report, “Realizing the Future We Want for All”, which served as an input to the work of the High Level Panel.

[2] Mrs. Mohammed had worked in the United Nations Millennium Project as a coordinator of the Task Force on Gender and Education.

[3] On inequalities; education; health; governance; conflict and fragility; growth and employment; environmental sustainability; hunger, nutrition and food security; population dynamics; energy; and water.

[4] The UNDG is a consortium created by the Secretary General of the United Nations in 1997, to improve the effectiveness of UN development activities at the country level.

[5] See <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org...>

[6] The ASG for Economic Development at DESA, the ASG for Development Policy at UNDP, the ASG for Policy and Programme at UN Women, and the Special Advisor on Post-2015 Development Planning.

[7] This Secretariat also serves the UN General Assembly's Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals.

[8] Amina J. Mohammed, ex officio; Gisela Alonso, Cuba; Fulbert Amoussouga Gero, Benin; Abhijit Banerjee, India; Gunilla Carlsson, Sweden; Patricia Espinosa, Mexico; Maria Angela Holguin, Colombia; Naoto Kan, Japan; Tawakkol Karman, Yemen; Sung-Hwan Kim, Republic of Korea; Horst Köhler, Germany; Graça Machel, Mozambique; Betty Maina, Kenya; Elvira Nabiullina, Russian Federation; Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Nigeria; Andris Piebalgs, Latvia; Emilia Pires, Timor-Leste; John Podesta, United States of America; Paul Polman, Netherlands; H.M. Queen Rania of Jordan, Jordan; Jean-Michel Severino, France; Izabella Teixeira, Brazil; Kadir Topbas, Turkey; Yingfan Wang, China.