

The Post-2015 Corporate Development Agenda

Expanding Corporate Power in the Name of Sustainable Development¹

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At the height of the global financial crisis in 2008, numerous commentators were keen to consign neoliberalism to the dustbin of history. From mainstream economists like Joseph Stiglitz, to politicians like Prime Minister Kevin Rudd of Australia, to Marxist scholars like Eric Hobsbawm, pundits prognosticated the demise of neoliberalism. Even Time Magazine featured the image of Karl Marx on its cover, displaying how the establishment was being haunted by the spectre of losing ideological ground to alternative perspectives.

Six years later, we are witnessing not the retreat of neoliberal globalization but its continued virulence. Instead of succumbing to the protracted crisis, elites have used the crisis itself to dispossess the toiling masses and redistribute wealth from poor to rich (e.g. through austerity). It has been used as an alibi to further restructure state institutions and social norms along market lines, with an extended raft of 'reforms' designed to advance privatisation and marketisation. In short, neoliberal globalization is continuing to restructure the world economy and social order to further expand and consolidate monopoly capitalist rule and safeguard the conditions for further capitalist accumulation.

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With the overwhelming evidence of persistent poverty, deepening inequality, ecological degradation and climate change accelerating under neoliberal globalization, elites are desperately proposing new pathways towards "sustainable development" that "leaves no one behind" and protects the planet all at the same time. This is based on the objective need to re-ignite the engines of growth in a global

economy still trapped in protracted stagnation, as well as to stave off the resurgence in peoples' resistance and struggles against intensifying exploitation, oppression and profound injustice.

In this context, the UN system is now engrossed with coming out with a new set of "Sustainable Development Goals" and a "Post-2015 development framework" to succeed the Millennium Development Goals which are supposed to have been achieved by 2015.

¹ This paper is based on a presentation made by the author at the Biennial Conference of the Asia-Pacific Research Network (APRN) on the theme of 'Building a People's Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda' held in Hong Kong, PRC last September 1-2, 2014.

These new goals and new framework will be agreed by Heads of States and Governments at a Special Event to be held at the UN Headquarters in September 2015. But will these new SDGs succeed where the MDGs failed? Will they really commit to a new paradigm of development or merely try to rescue the old paradigm by claiming to reconcile continuous growth in profits with eradicating poverty, narrowing inequality, and respecting the planet's ecological limits?

The corporate sector has long been trying to position itself front and center of the post-2015 development framework. Strong business support for a linkage with the Post-2015 agenda emerged as Member States first called for the establishment of SDGs at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in June of 2012. Meeting in parallel, corporations voted by acclamation to take part in formulating and enacting this new set of goals (Mugo, 2014).

The fact that the corporate sector is expressing satisfaction over the SDGs and the emerging Post-2015 development agenda should be enough to raise alarm bells for civil society critical of the corporate-led, market-fundamentalist paradigm that has dominated development policy over the last four decades.

In a white paper titled “The Role of Business and Finance in Supporting the Post-2015 Agenda” published by the UN Global Compact, the authors state, “A new paradigm in development thinking is recognizing the centrality of private enterprise in pursuit of the development agenda – and vice versa” (p. 3). The UN Global Compact is the world's largest corporate responsibility initiative with over 7,500 business signatories in more than 140 countries, and 101 local networks. Participating companies – working with an array of non-business stakeholders – commit

to align their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption, as well as to take actions in support of broader United Nations goals such as the Millennium Development Goals (and the future SDGs, it is safe to presume).

The UN Global Compact conducted a series of international consultations, surveys, and focus group discussions in 2014 where business participants identified a set of global priorities for the P2015 era – on economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainable development: “These suggested priorities are all areas in which there is enormous potential for the private sector to advance. However, it requires the scale and intensity of corporate sustainability globally to be significantly enhanced. And it demands a new leadership paradigm that places collaboration and co-investment at its core” (p.4).

After the intergovernmental Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs came out with its recommended list of 17 goals and 169 targets, the UN Global Compact expressed satisfaction at the results: “It is encouraging that so many of the priorities emerging from business consultations have turned out to be in alignment with the revised OWG “zero draft” released on 30 June” (p. 6).

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This paper attempts to contribute to that critical examination by analyzing the reports and briefs from the business sector related to the Post-2015 development agenda, particularly those published by the UN Global Compact. The following discussion explains how corporations are staking a claim to the post-2015 agenda at three levels:

1. First, by setting goals that would suit their priorities for expansion.
2. Second, by claiming a primary role in mobilizing the means for implementing these goals.
3. Third, by shaping the governance framework that would be set-up to ensure progress in this agenda.

1. Setting the goals

The UN Global Compact has released a series of issue papers outlining the critical role of the business sector in achieving global sustainability goals. A cursory reading of the proposed goals therein may lead one to think that the priorities of the corporate sector are aligned with many of the goals that civil society organizations (CSOs) are advocating and what governments have agreed to in the OWG.

Therefore these proposed goals need a second look in the cold light of actual trends in business practices and state policies today.

Proposed Goals from UN Global Compact (partial list)	Proposed Goals from Intergovernmental Open Working Group on SDGs (partial list)
<i>"End poverty and increase prosperity via inclusive economic growth"</i>	Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
<i>"Good nutrition for all through sustainable food and agricultural systems"</i>	Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
<i>"Modernize infrastructure and technology"</i>	Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
<i>"Universal health coverage"</i>	Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all
<i>"Quality education for all"</i>	Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all
<i>"Build peaceful and stable societies"</i>	Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
<i>"Good governance and realization of human rights"</i>	

For instance, one of the main goals proposed by the UN Global Compact comes under the banner "**End poverty and increase prosperity by inclusive economic growth**".

In its first issue paper *“The Role of Business in Fighting Poverty”*, the UN Global Compact outlined the many initiatives done by multinational corporations in addressing poverty including making inclusiveness of the poor a key to their business models; moving to equalize opportunities for women; forming coalitions to crack down on and find alternatives to child labour in their workplaces and among their suppliers; micro-credit organizations and larger investment institutions extending credit to lower income or traditionally marginalized groups; large corporations supporting the development of small and medium-sized firms (SMEs), including social enterprises;” and so on.

And yet there is no mention of committing Compact members to pay a living wage to their employees or to eliminate tax evasion and tax avoidance practices that rob developing countries of hundreds of billions of dollars per year. According to Global Financial Integrity, developing countries lost US\$5.9 trillion to illicit financial outflows from 2002 to 2011 – \$954 billion in 2011 alone – resources that could have been used to combat poverty directly through public investments in basic services, infrastructure and technology development, job creation, and economic diversification.

Green and inclusive policies are not even close to being the mainstream practice of the business sector. Out of the 82,000 multinational companies, only 3,000 or so are exploring inclusive models according to the Harvard Business School (Hutchinson, 2012). And some of these so-called “inclusive business strategies” are nothing but insidious ways of preying on impoverished people. Consider Unilever’s “Fair & Lovely” skin whitening cream products that are sold to women in 40 countries across Asia and Africa, especially India. Its commercials typically depict a depressed woman with few prospects of gaining a brighter future by attaining either a husband or a job unless they have fairer complexion. This is from a company that is held up as a stalwart of corporate social responsibility and one of the most influential players in embedding the corporate sustainability agenda in the Post-2015 development framework. Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever, is Vice-Chairman of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and a member of the UN Secretary-General’s High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

In Issue Paper 5, the UN Global Compact explains the business approach to achieving the proposed goal **“Good nutrition for all through sustainable food and agricultural systems”**. The authors write,

Businesses are taking part through development of new crops and training of farmers in new technologies. Provision of affordable and quality inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, farm equipment, water-conserving irrigation systems, processing or re-cycling of waste to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and bins and containers for fragile crops such as vegetables all play an important role in helping farmers increase the scale of their operations and incomes. There is mutual advantage in integrating geographically and economically isolated, smallholder farmers – many of whom are women - into national, regional and global enterprises and their value chains. (p. 2)

So from the business point of view, this goal is about integrating geographically and economically isolated small farmers, many of whom are women, into the global value chains of transnational corporations (TNCs). TNCs like Nestle for instance would go from country to country contracting with small farmers for the production and supply of coffee or soy. The terms and conditions are typically determined unilaterally by the

TNC: what seed variety to use; what inputs are going to go into the land; when crops are going to be delivered; what production methods are used; how much will be paid, and so on, often in very detrimental terms and conditions for smallholder farmers. As a result, many small farmers' gross incomes are increasing but their net incomes are decreasing because of rising costs of seeds and production inputs supplied by other TNCs. Just three companies control over half of global commercial sales of seeds, of which about a quarter are sales of genetically engineered seeds.

So there are definitely profits to be made from promoting "good nutrition for all" through integrating small farmers into the global value chains of these TNCs. But almost all of these gains accrue to the latter.

"Modernize infrastructure and technology" is another important goal proposed by the UN Global Compact. According to its Issue Paper 9, "Physical infrastructure presents a huge challenge and an equally massive opportunity. Requirements for new infrastructure vary from \$200 to \$1 trillion per year, depending on which sectors are included – energy, transport, water and sanitation, agriculture, ICT, and so on." (p. 2)

Clearly, enormous profits are to be made in infrastructure megaprojects and urban development. But one major hindrance to private sector investment in these undertakings is risk. These are usually massive investments with significant risks and long-term gestation periods before costs are recovered. Hence the UN Global Compact advocates charging of user fees, cost-recovery schemes and targeted subsidies despite evidences pointing to their detrimental effects to low-income families.

Clearly, enormous profits are to be made in infrastructure megaprojects and urban development. But one major hindrance to private sector investment in these undertakings is risk. These are usually massive investments with significant risks and long-term gestation periods before costs are recovered. Hence the Issue Paper recommends, "Cost recovery, i.e., charges for use, will mitigate difficulties in attracting long-term investment in energy, transport and water, and also encourage conservation. Rather than provide overall discounts, price reductions should be targeted to the poor."

This is despite the surfeit of evidence pointing to the detrimental impacts of user-fees and cost-recovery

schemes to low-income families whether in health, education, water, electricity, and so on. For instance, a recent study on the privatisation of development finance for public services delivery by the UK Government and its impact on the rights of poor women in developing countries revealed that user fees have not only reduced access to services but also negatively affected the time and opportunities which women have to engage in paid work, education or community activities (Lethbridge, 2014).

This negative impact on the poor is not necessarily offset by targeted subsidies such as through conditional cash transfers which have become the social safety net of choice by exponents of neoliberalism. The same study above makes the important point that "the expansion of private sector provision has detrimental effects on public sector provision because it draws middle income users away from the public sector.

This undermines the process of cross-subsidisation which enables universal provision of public services, funded through taxation with higher income groups contributing more than lower income groups“ (p. 29).

And yet that seems to be the business reasoning behind their support for the otherwise laudable goal of “**universal health coverage**” (or “sustainable energy for all”, “education for all”, etc.).

The UN Global Compact’s Issue Paper 4 on “*The Role of Business in Improving Health*” recommends, “Policies should be pursued to ensure an operating environment that optimizes the contribution from the private sector. Some of the key issues the private sector faces include regulatory harmonization, international reference pricing, anti-diversion, robust IP, accelerating uptake of new products and increasing vaccine coverage. Some solutions could include easing commercial entry barriers, addressing taxes and duties still imposed on medicines, and encouraging access to quality-assured medicines through private market support and advocacy in the developing world.” (p. 3)

Regulatory harmonization is one of the major thrusts of so-called 21st century trade agreements currently being negotiated worldwide. Basically, corporations want to change regulations in services sectors to ease commercial entry barriers, including reductions in taxes and duties, while strengthening intellectual property rights of TNCs including pharmaceutical giants.

This is one reason why “regulatory harmonization” is one of the major thrusts of so-called 21st century trade agreements currently being negotiated by governments worldwide, including the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the US and EU, the Transpacific Partnership (TPP) between the US and 11 other countries, and the Trade in Services Agreement in the WTO. Basically, they want to change regulations in services sectors to ease commercial entry barriers, including reductions in taxes and duties, while strengthening intellectual property rights of TNCs

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For instance, regulatory harmonization will mean getting rid of what these TNCs regard as ‘trade irritants’ such as the EU’s bans on GM food, chlorinated chicken and hormone loaded beef’ and other higher EU health and safety standards.

TNCs are not only poised to profit from the direct provision of goods, infrastructure and services. They also see indirect opportunities in a goal such as “**Quality education for all**”. The UN Global Compact’s Issue Paper 2 on “*The Business Role in Better Education*” rightfully underscores that “Businesses are motivated to coordinate with secondary and tertiary schools, so that graduates are prepared to fill job opportunities, with a business and social payoff in lower rates of unemployment and higher productivity.” (p. 2) But it is also quick to point out numerous other commercial opportunities that can be exploited by companies such as “Technology firms, for instance, that develop new software or educational systems that can be utilized over mobile phones for local and national school districts” and “media companies that sell

games are developing curricula through associated non-profits, using their specific expertise.” (p. 2)

So businesses are now coordinating with educational institutions to make sure that school curricula are in tempo with the needs of industry and technology is increasingly used in education. Companies are now selling ever more gadgets to replace the printed book, promote online-based learning platforms and/or sell so-called educational games to “supplement” traditional learning methods. Nation building becomes an accidental byproduct of this commercialized education system.

If that is not enough, the UN Global Compact points to the public relations benefits of investing in education. The paper notes that “To build trust and brand quality in lower income neighborhoods, construction firms are contributing to improved schoolhouse infrastructure.” (p. 2)

Indeed human rights is just another form of currency for TNCs calling for the goal “**Good governance and the realization of human rights**”. In Issue Paper 10, the UN Global Compact writes, “The UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights sets out a clear framework for this approach, which is not only a social responsibility but also a means for strengthening brand credentials, building customer loyalty and attracting investment” (author’s emphasis) (p. 2)

We should not be lulled into thinking that the SDGs are a step forward because they purport to address many of the important needs and concerns of the people. As we have shown in this section, they may very well be used to justify policies and practices that undermine the lofty aspirations we may mistake them for.

In the same vein, the UN Global Compact supports the goal “**Build peaceful and stable societies**” for the simple reason that violent conflicts are bad for business. In Issue Paper 8, it writes: “Governments of countries where risks are rising are encouraged to engage in confidence building dialogues and interchanges, calling on business leaders as appropriate. In many conflict situations, business leaders are among those with most to gain from settlement of differences, and have resources that can be brought to bear in critical

situations.” (p. 3)

But what is not acknowledged here is that businesses are actually partisan in many violent conflicts. In the Philippines, Colombia, India and in many other areas where indigenous peoples or rural communities are fighting encroachment by landlords and extractive companies, the “affected companies” are regularly consulted by the military and by the state on how to quell resistance. This resistance is almost always depicted as subversive or terrorist. Historically and at present, many paramilitary forces, while under the command of the military, receive payments from mining and logging companies to fight these “insurgents”. These companies thereby further fuel the conflict and escalate human rights violations (Schwabe, 2013).

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2. Means of Implementation

The second level by which corporations are staking a claim in the Post-2015 Development Agenda is in ensuring the means of implementation, especially in terms of financing these goals.

Estimates for the investments needed to achieve the unmet poverty eradication, education and health targets of the MDGs vary between \$20bn and \$200bn per year. Those for incremental investment requirements in infrastructure – taking in areas such as water management and sanitation, extension of energy grids and new and alternative sources, and cleaner, speedier urban and rural transport – range between

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\$600bn and \$3tn per year. This does not yet include the full costs for climate adaptation and mitigation needed to cope with climate change and keep global temperature increase to under 2 degrees Celsius. The estimated cost of addressing the climate needs of developing countries alone is pegged at around USD 0.5-1 trillion a year.

But in the wake of the global financial crisis and amidst the continuing stagnation of the global economy, most governments are implementing fiscal consolidation. Many of the advanced economies are cutting back on public expenditure to contain deficits and debt-to-GDP ratios, affecting social benefits, public sector employment and wages. Among middle-income economies, budget deficits and debt ratios are

moderate on average but many of them are saddled with rising contingent liabilities. Moreover, most middle-income countries are faced with lower growth potentials and tighter financing conditions, hence, many of them are undertaking tax and subsidy reform to protect their fiscal stance. For low-income developing countries, immediate fiscal risks are moderate but the emphasis on fiscal policy is improving revenue mobilization (International Monetary Fund, 2014). In other words, governments across the board are in no mood to spend.

Instead, they are turning towards the private sector. Indeed, there is a very legitimate point in chasing after the money in the hands of the world's richest 1%. Just 5% of the 56.62 trillion dollar wealth of the world's so-called High Net Worth Individuals is enough

to cover the annual cost of universal social protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation combined.²

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In a paper titled Financing Sustainable Development, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) goes so far as to say that, “In general terms, public investment covers areas where private, for-profit financing is intrinsically insufficient or impossible” (p. 23). So for the SDSN, the problem is one of incentives:

Today’s markets do not provide adequate incentives for private businesses to contribute towards sustainable development. The key is to combine public financing, regulation, and private market participation into an effective public-private partnership (PPP) or “goal-based investment partnerships.” (p.24)

One way that governments and financial institutions are doing this is through “blended finance” or the practice of linking grants, provided by official development assistance (ODA), with loans from publicly owned institutions or commercial lenders. Donor countries, the World Bank Group and other development finance institutions are promoting this as a way of enhancing the financial viability and sustainability of development projects such as large infrastructure investments. But critics point out that this is essentially another way of using public money to subsidize private investments. As Eurodad notes, “There has been an increase in development finance institutions (DFIs) and EU donors using blending mechanisms to increase support and lending to private companies and to partner with private financiers by using ever larger quantities of ODA” (p. 4).

PPPs can also take the form of agreements that shift the risks associated with private investments to the public sector. This can take the form of guaranteed subsidies or credit, such as state-guaranteed loans to farmers buying new commercial seed varieties; or payment guarantees, such as a power-purchasing agreement between a private coal-fired power plant and a state-owned utility; or revenue guarantees, such as an agreement that ensures a minimum income stream to a private toll road operator regardless of actual road usage. The essential feature of these PPPs is that they provide private companies with contract-based rights to flows of public money or to

² High net worth individuals (HNWI) are defined as those having investable assets of US\$1 million or more, excluding primary residence, collectibles, consumables, and consumer durables. According to Capgemini’s World Wealth Report 2014, the aggregate investable wealth of HNWI was US\$56.62 trillion in 2013, up by 14% from 2012 (Capgemini & RBC Wealth Management, 2014, p. 4). According to calculations by the International Labour Organization, less than 2 per cent of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would be necessary to provide a basic set of social security benefits to all of the world’s poor (p. 3). This is equivalent to \$1.47 trillion in 2013. Estimates of incremental costs of climate change adaptation in developing countries range from US\$4-100 billion per annum. Estimates of incremental investments needed for climate change mitigation range from \$69 – 565 billion per annum (Climate Funds Update, 2015).

monopoly income streams from services on which the public rely such as roads, schools, hospitals and health services (Hildyard, 2014, p. 6) . This means that if for some unforeseen reason, investors are not able to recoup their costs from user fees, for instance, the government has to put up the money that investors had projected but failed to realize. The proliferation of PPPs is one of the factors behind the rising contingent liabilities of some middle-income countries today.

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There are also multi-stakeholder partnerships which bring together donor agencies, non-governmental organizations, private philanthropy and other stakeholders to address specific challenges – from vaccinations, to agricultural research, to child health, to provision of education, or even hand-washing. For instance the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) is a partnership between the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), a number of African governments and

international research centers. According to its official website, AGRA aims to catalyze a uniquely African Green Revolution by creating “transformative partnerships” that address the challenges African farmers face today - poor soils, degraded soils, unreliable water supplies, poor access to markets, insufficient access to finance and credit and too little government support.

But critics point out that AGRA’s version of “transformative partnerships” is premised on African governments shouldering the cost and burden of developing regulatory procedures and infrastructure to enable private agribusiness to profit from new African markets. For instance, AGRA is working with governments and other international and private entities to ‘harmonise’ seed laws across the continent, to allow private seed companies greater control over seed systems. Although AGRA is not directly promoting genetically modified (GM) seeds, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation invests heavily in research and development of GM seeds on the continent and owns shares in Monsanto (African Centre for Biosafety, 2013, p. 13). This illustrates the multiple conflicts of interest embodied by many multi-stakeholder partnerships, particularly in terms of entities representing corporate interests having direct influence over the policies and priorities of “partner governments” or agencies.

To add insult to injury, despite the claims that PPPs are key to mobilizing more resources for the pursuit of sustainable development objectives, there is little evidence showing that PPPs benefit the most marginalized and impoverished. The World Bank Group’s own internal evaluation of PPPs it has supported from 2002-2012 revealed that the main measure of success for PPPs is “business performance.” Data on the actual long-term performance of PPPs are rare and improved access for the poor was only recorded in about 10 per cent of cases – leaving open the possibility that low-income groups are actually worse off in 90 per cent of cases (Hildyard, 2014, p. 11).

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Another study by CAFOD concluded that "the majority of finance in existing PPPs goes to well-performing sectors such as telecoms, where commercial returns are likely to be high". They cite other research analysing the destination of the development finance channeled to the private sector by the European Investment Bank and the private sector arm of the World Bank, which found that big business, wealthier countries and tax havens benefitted most (CAFOD, 2013, p. 14).

3. Governance

However it is not enough that the private sector is mobilized for sustainable development goals and objectives. As the World Economic Forum laments, "while experimentation with individual public-private and multi-stakeholder partnerships has flourished over the past decade, including in many international organizations, they continue to play an incremental, even experimental, role in the international system rather than a systematic one. For this to change, policy-making processes and institutional structures themselves will need to be adapted and perhaps even fundamentally repositioned with this in mind." The WEF concludes, "The time has come for a new stakeholder paradigm of international governance analogous to that embodied in the stakeholder theory of corporate governance" (p. 29)

Hence, the third level of the corporate takeover of the Post-2015 development agenda is in the governance framework for sustainable development.

The UN Global Compact and other "expert groups" who have submitted recommendations to the UN all call for a business-friendly view of corporate regulation and a soft approach to accountability. They stress the need to improve transparency and the metrics for assessing corporate sustainability but they rely on the willingness of large corporations to report on their impact and the voluntary commitments they have made (Pingeot, 2014, p. 24).

So the governance approach preferred by the UN Global Compact is to encourage corporations to put on public their commitments to principles and goals and come up with standard measurement or metrics to measure corporate sustainability. However, all these are on a voluntary basis. The rationale, according to the WEF, is that "there is an opportunity to achieve a step change in global environmental governance by focusing less on the traditional agenda (UN structure, new legal frameworks) and more on a new agenda to construct practical, often public-private, mechanisms that can accelerate progress even in the absence of agreement on new multilateral legal obligations."

In other words, this multi-stakeholder approach to governance that rely on the voluntary commitment of coalitions-of-the-willing serves as an alternative to a legally binding framework with clear obligations on the part of states including the obligation to regulate the private sector. So while PPPs and the “multi-stakeholder approach”

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This is supported by critical academic work which has emphasized the limitations of PPPs in relation to possible co-optation of NGOs, the state and UN agencies; a weakening of efforts to hold transnational corporations

accountable for their actions; the development of an internal culture of censorship in non-profit and UN organizations; and the lack of effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to ensure that PPPs promote public, and not just private, interests (Lund-Thomsen, 2007, p. 2).

At the same time, the focus on business as the driver of the new development agenda and the aggressive push for “partnerships” obscure the ultimate obligation of governments in providing public goods and services and fulfilling people’s rights. The provision of public goods becomes unreliable as it increasingly becomes dependent on voluntary and ultimately unpredictable sources of financing. This adds pressure to privatize this provisioning, thereby flouting the rights-based understanding of people as rights-holders and governments as duty-bearers compelled to account for their human rights obligations under international and national laws.

To make matters worse, the so-called 21st century trade and investment agreements that governments are currently negotiating would grant greater rights to corporations, even empowering them to sue governments in secretive international tribunals for imposing new regulations that adversely affect their expected profits like what is happening in Argentina or Uruguay.

So to summarize, the stakes for big business in the Post-2015 development agenda are clear: the Post-2015 development agenda offers enormous investment opportunities to the tune of trillions per year in infrastructure alone. Second, they allow corporations to externalize costs and socialize risks in investments, particularly in infrastructure, for more profits. Third, they allow corporations new ways of enhancing their public relations and making themselves appear environmentally and socially responsible but without real accountability.

So what is the emerging post-2015 development agenda?

We need to ask the following questions regarding the emerging post-2015 agenda: is it a people's agenda? Or is it a vehicle for expanding, strengthening transnational corporate power? Is it an agenda that is simply about expanding and building on the MDGs? Or is it a strategy for reinvigorating and re-legitimizing the global capitalist model and neoliberal globalization?

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One way of looking at the emerging post-2015 agenda is that it's an expanded and revalued MDGs in the sense that it's now introducing new issues and concerns that were

absent in the MDGs. In that sense, some people welcome it. But as the foregoing discussion has shown, there are perhaps more reasons to be alarmed -- that the post-2015 agenda can actually be hijacked for furthering big corporate interests. Thus many from the civil society warn about the danger of the privatization of the post-2015 agenda aimed at rationalizing and legitimizing the further expansion of corporate power in the guise of promoting sustainability and addressing the needs of the poor.

If the agenda that finally emerges in September 2015 turns out to be a rehashed version or even an expansion of the MDGs but lacking in substantive action to overhaul the dominant neoliberal development framework, then it is an agenda that will definitely perpetuate and deepen the impoverishment, inequality, environmental degradation, and the climate crisis.

Fighting for an alternative future

The notion that history ends with the era of neoliberal globalization no longer holds ideological sway. While the corporate machine appears to be indomitable, they are in fact in panic mode. The best evidence of this is the extent to which corporate forces go to repress the people and prevent egalitarian and participatory democracy and justice to be established. They work incessantly to see to it that policies are never publicly debated, that it had to take online investigative journalists such as Wikileaks to reveal the dangers that highly secretive negotiations such as the TPP and TTIP pose to our freedom, lives, security and wellbeing.

There is a need to reflect on the role of civil society given these crises and challenges and in relation to the emerging post-2015 development agenda.

First, we need to be vigilant. Many from the civil society, especially grassroots, are unenthused over the post-2015 discussion, opining that the UN or even governments cannot be depended on to implement reforms and address people's concerns anyway. However, there is a very compelling reason why we need to intervene in these spaces.

The danger lies, not only in the post-2015 agenda falling short of addressing people's concerns and needs, but also in perpetuating and reinforcing some of the negative strategies and trends we have been fighting against.

Second, we need to be smart in the sense that we need to precisely examine and study the implications of this emerging post-2015 agenda: how it can affect our constituencies on the ground and what can be done about it. We need to examine the post-2015 process, not in isolation, but in relation to wider trends and the broader context of development policies.

Development justice strikes at the roots of the structural problems of inequality, dispossession, exclusion, and poverty and addresses sectors' manifold demands in a comprehensive and interlinked manner. Development justice, in sum, solidifies peoples' unity in struggling for a new political economy based on the principles of cooperation, equality, justice and freedom.

We need to be organized. Many groups are doing their own bit in terms of promoting people's agenda and alternative, but what we are facing is a systemic problem concerning the entire development model. So, it requires organizational linking up of civil society across issues, across sectors, and at different levels — from local to national, national to regional, regional to international.

We need to find ways of making those links effective. We need to smartly confront these challenges at all levels and in all arenas. That

entails engaging the UN, confronting the WTO, TPPA and other trade and investment agreements; COP 22 and other UN process; the G7 and the G20; and so on. It's about those local laws that are being implemented, such as GMO legislations that are being adopted in many countries. All of these we need to challenge in an organized and linked-up way.

Finally, we need to end the corporate war against the poor and challenge the system itself. It's not just enough to come up with goals unless one challenges the roots of the problem of underdevelopment, poverty, and the ecological crisis.

Development justice is a term coined by civil society and grassroots organizations for their vision of a new development model to counter the neoliberal assault. Broadly, development justice comprises of five transformative shifts namely, redistributive justice, economic justice, social and gender justice, environmental justice and accountability to the people. Development justice strikes at the roots of the structural problems of inequality, dispossession, exclusion, and poverty and addresses sectors' manifold demands in a comprehensive and interlinked manner. Development justice, in sum, solidifies peoples' unity in struggling for a new political economy based on the principles of cooperation, equality, justice and freedom.³

³ For more on Development Justice, visit <http://peoplesgoals.org/devjustice/>

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