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Whose Development, Whose UN?

Reclaiming the UN's Values-Based Framework

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- The Millennium Development Goals expire in 2015 and the United Nations system is debating »sustainable development goals« for multilateral development cooperation in the coming years. Against this backdrop, this paper takes a hard look at the state of the UN's historically values-based framework and the interests of the different development actors shaping the post-2015 development paradigm in order to assess in whose interests the paradigm is being fashioned. The resulting insights offer important recommendations on transparency and accountability for governments, civil society, business and the UN Secretariat.

- A new accountability framework, rather than a new partnership for development, should be the priority on the post-2015 development agenda. This would help to ensure that the interests of stakeholders – especially of the most powerful players – are aligned with their stated purpose and do not contradict the values-based standards of the organisation.

- The UN should disclose financial contributions from the corporate sector and establish a clear framework for interacting with the private sector and managing conflicts of interest, in particular by differentiating between policy development and appropriate involvement in implementation.

Dialogue on Globalization

Introduction[1]

In the year 2013, two significant world records were broken. The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere reached 400 parts per million, a milestone not surpassed in several million years. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued its starkest warning to date, stating that, even if the world began to moderate greenhouse gas emissions today, warming was likely to cross the critical 2C threshold by the end of the century. In the same year, *Forbes* Magazine's list of the world's richest people included a record number of 1,426 billionaires, with a total historical net worth of $5.4 trillion, a sum on par with the GDP of Japan. Increasingly, concerned citizens are making the connection between the environmental impacts of the current economic order and its socio-economic consequences. In the wake of a crisis of global proportions, protesters from Argentina to Canada, Iceland to Madagascar, India to South Korea and beyond are challenging austerity measures, jobless growth and increasing levels of inequality. And they are calling for a radical overhaul.

It is in this context that the UN is taking the lead on the »post-2015 agenda,« a multi-year process charged with the task of eradicating poverty and ensuring social inclusion while preserving the environment. The post-2015 process is expected to be a major shaper of future sustainable development activities globally, with implications for both the Global South and the Global North. Reports coming out of the process are rife with references to »transformational changes« and »paradigm shifts.« At the same time, they emphasise voluntary commitments, public-private partnerships and bilateral agreements as the means to achieve these outcomes. While such initiatives can draw in relevant players, they are also a way for powerful member states and other actors to evade universal accountability frameworks and water down and re-define their own commitments.

Is it fanciful and naïve to see the UN as the organising hub for peace and justice? As a place to fight for sustainable livelihoods and planetary survival? The UN Charter states that, »we the peoples of the United Nations« are determined to »reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person« and »to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.« These exalted wishes have not always been in vain. In its almost seventy years of existence, the UN has helped more than eighty former colonies gain their independence. The organisation has been the locus and political organising space for human rights and environmental treaties, and it has established a well-known and respected values-based framework.

The UN has the potential to be a universal space for holding all accountable, including the powerful. It provides instruments that many Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and social movements have used to challenge existing power relations. But, too often, the organisation appears to have chosen to forego this mission. Like many NGOs, the UN has sacrificed its mandate for access to power – and the entry fees keep increasing.

In an effort to be relevant, the UN tailors many of its policies and politics to the demands of the powerful. Faced with the daunting task of ensuring the world's transition to sustainable development, the organisation offers limited solutions that fail to challenge the model of doing business. At a time when Northern capitals tout the benefits of a multi-stakeholder approach to governance, the UN tries to gain the corporate sector's favour by shifting its policies from accountability to corporate social responsibility. This, not surprisingly, results in inconsistent attention to its values-based framework. Many of the more recent agreements struck at the UN make only passing reference to this framework, or seem to ignore it entirely.

The refusal of power centers to be held accountable at the UN is cornering the organisation into the thankless role of preventing the cracks in the system from tearing the whole structure apart. As pragmatism becomes the order of the day, many advocates find it easier to promote piecemeal solutions than to challenge the conditions that allow poverty, inequality and environmental destruction to be reproduced.

In the aftermath of the economic crisis, and under pressure from the demands of the post-2015 agenda, the question is: will the organisation be driven further from a holistic, integrated values-based approach? These challenges – the shift to band-aids rather than transformative solutions, the growing mainstreaming of the business

1. This paper builds on many interviews with representatives of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and social movements, conducted as part of a research project on modalities for civil society participation in the UN's high-level political forum.

worldview – are not specific to the UN, but the organisation does offer unique tools to address them. The post-2015 process provides a critical moment to seize and build on the values, mandate and universal applicability that the UN offers to re-capture the agenda.

The UN remains more open to public participation than many other inter-governmental bodies and fora, with room for innovation in engagement and deliberation. However, if participation is to be more than a box-ticking exercise, it must acknowledge power imbalances and not adopt a supposed level-playing field between stakeholders – in particular between civil society advocates for »the public good« and »global commons« on the one hand and the corporate sector on the other. Models for engagement must differentiate roles and not confuse decision-making with implementation or rights with financing. And the UN must assert its capacity to hold all, even the most powerful, accountable to a universal values-based framework.

1. The Future We Don't Want

The UN's post-2015 process is happening in the wake of an economic crisis of global proportions and at a time of rising challenges to the current global order. In the past few years, mass protest movements have erupted in North Africa, Europe and North and Latin America in what some have dubbed the global »movement of squares.« Occupying public spaces, the Arab Spring, Occupy, the Indignados, »le mouvement des casseroles« and others grew in distinct contexts but often shared a common rejection of what they argue are failed economic policies. Protesters have challenged a global economy that, bent on fostering growth at all costs, fuels increasing inequalities, benefiting a few and leaving many behind. They have denounced the failure of representative democracy to address policies driven by unaccountable supra- or international entities and private corporations, and challenged the governments that placate them.

Anti-austerity protests in Europe questioned why, to save the European economy and the Eurozone, ordinary citizens had to shoulder rising unemployment levels and dramatic public service cuts while many banks and corporations saw only a temporary dent in their profits and continue to resist public regulation and accountability. Protesters declared that this was, »their crisis, not ours!« Occupy similarly adopted slogans pitting »the 1%« against »the 99%« to denounce a rigged economic system. And the Arab Spring was not just the result of a governance failure, as was often argued in the media, but a challenge to failed economic policies and a lack of development.

In the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis, these movements also shared a suspicion of international and supra-national entities such as the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. They saw these bodies as challenges to representative democracy and puppet-masters pulling the strings of unaccountable governments. Occupy Wall Street – which emerged not long after the US Supreme Court had declared that corporations were »people« – also took a particularly active stand against the domination of the economy by corporate interests. To many, the reckless (and criminal) behaviour of big banks in the lead up to the 2008 financial meltdown, large scale environmental disasters caused by corporate negligence (BP in the Gulf of Mexico), as well as high-profile cases of tax evasion (Starbucks, Google, Amazon) and of labour law abuses (Apple, Samsung, the garment industry in Bangladesh), together exposed something rotten in the corporate-led economic order.

The financial and economic crises had shaken the core of the system, and the protest movements argued for a radical overhaul, not just minor adjustments to pave the way for a return to business as usual. Many warned against the threat of »discourse repackaging.« Following the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, for instance, critics noted that the IMF was quick to repackage its usual proposals with new references to social policies, pro-poor development and inclusivity. These movements, although they should not be uncritically embraced, have crystallised a discontent with the global economic order and social malaise widely shared across countries. In efforts to build a new agenda for sustainable development, the UN will lose out and narrow its scope of work if it does not respond to the important issues raised by protest movements.

2. Challenges Facing the UN

Turn to the Non-public Sector

The UN is taking the lead on the future of sustainable development at a time of decline in global multilateralism. Many states, in particular the largest economic powers, have historically preferred to deal with macroeconomic issues related to international trade and investment or the global financial system within the international financial institutions. The turn to unilateralism and bilateralism has undermined the UN as a relevant forum for global economic governance. Powerful member states have chosen to deal with the hard core of development either in exclusive fora like the G20 or in fora with a US veto and dominant voting weight, such as the World Bank. The artificial decoupling of economic/financial issues from development cooperation often reduces the UN to trying to fix the worst aspects of the current system without the possibility of addressing the root causes. UN-led efforts can only succeed if they reconnect these areas.

At the same time, many observers argue that today's global problems (from climate change to the economic crisis) challenge not only the capacity of individual states to act on their own, but also the state-centric model of international politics. The World Economic Forum's »Global Redesign Initiative,« for instance, calls for a fundamental reshaping of global governance towards »multi-stakeholder governance« comprising governments, corporate actors and civil society. The corporate sector is increasingly seen as the pivotal player in the future of economic governance and development.

Questioned in its role as a global forum to address the challenges of our time and keen to remain relevant, the UN, led by the Secretary-General, has turned to this seemingly indispensable player to reposition itself. Starting in the late 1990s, and increasingly in the post-2015 context, the UN has welcomed the corporate sector as a legitimate partner in decision-making processes and program work. Some UN programs and processes have adopted a »multi-stakeholder« approach to policymaking, allowing civil society and the private sector to provide input into policy discussions and actively participate in consultations. In 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development launched the concept of voluntary, multi-stakeholder initiatives to facilitate and expedite the realisation of sustainable development goals and commitments. There are currently several high-profile initiatives that bring together governments, the UN, NGOs and the private sector to address issues ranging from women and children's health (Every Woman Every Child) to sustainable energy (Sustainable Energy for All).

The UN's turn to the private sector did not happen in a vacuum; it mirrored policies adopted and promoted by member states and followed the lead of the international financial institutions. It also occurred at a time when the organisation was looking for alternative sources of funding, particularly during a period of financial crisis as states failed to pay their full dues and cut their donations to the UN's voluntary funds.

The corporate sector has positioned itself as one of the key players in discussions around the post-2015 development agenda. The report of the High Level Panel (HLP) of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 development agenda, convened by the UN Secretary-General to feed into the post-2015 process, notes that it, »consulted the chief executive officers of 250 companies in 30 countries, with annual revenues exceeding $8 trillion« (an average of $32 billion per company). Transnational corporations are also active in the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), a process set up by the Secretary-General to »mobilise scientific and technical expertise from academia, civil society, and the private sector in support of sustainable development problem solving.« The SDSN Leadership Council includes companies like mining giants Vale and Anglo American.

The reports submitted by the HLP and the SDSN to feed into the post-2015 process describe the private sector as one of the major shapers of development along with governments (national and local), international organisations, civil society, foundations, academia and people. The reports encourage these groups to »forge a new global partnership« for development, but they are particularly vocal on the special role to be played by the private sector. In its choice of partners and its analysis of what needs to be done, the UN is placing the corporate sector and corporate philanthropy at the centre of its agenda for sustainable development and the new »global partnership.« The UN Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 Agenda, »A life of dignity for all,« praises the »multi-stakeholder partnership model«

and proposes to establish a new United Nations Partnership Facility.

Efforts to bring UN principles into the activities of corporations have created a two-way street, as corporations also have had an impact on UN policies. In the span of just a few decades, UN debates have shifted from the possibility of a multilateral instrument to regulate transnational corporations to what has been termed, »the largest corporate social responsibility initiative in the world« – the Global Compact. The Compact, a voluntary initiative designed to encourage businesses to align their operations and strategies with ten principles in the area of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption, currently has over 7,000 business participants and is reportedly aiming to recruit 20,000 by 2020. Many companies have committed to the Compact's principles, but there is a need for more evidence that this has truly affected their behaviour. A 2011 report from the UN's own watchdog, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), highlighted that, in the absence of change, the Global Compact could represent what it called a »reputational« risk for the organisation.

Adoption of Market-led Solutions

Not surprisingly, this business-friendly view is reflected in the solutions that the post-2015 process has put forward. The UN reports published so far, including the report of the HLP and the Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly on the MDGs and the new development agenda, have put great emphasis on the need for economic growth as a precondition for sustainable development. While planetary boundaries are often acknowledged, new technologies (to be developed by the private sector) are simultaneously presented as the miraculous solution that will allow humanity to decouple growth from resource use. The assertion that, with the right technologies, things can more or less go on as they are evades difficult questions about the unequal use of resources and does not challenge production and consumption patterns designed to maximise corporate profit.

At the Rio 2012 conference, the »green economy« became the focus of tensions around the strategies needed to achieve change. In anticipation of the Rio Conference, the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) published a report promoting a transition to the green economy as the solution to the environmental crises. The concept has, however, proved controversial. Although some CSOs support it, many others argue that the green economy operates within and relies too heavily on the framework of a market-led economic system. The green economy concept ultimately rests on the questionable assumption that catastrophe will be averted if the corporate sector can be convinced that being green is more profitable. For many, this sounds more like discourse repackaging than the systemic change that is needed.

Crisis of Confidence

In March 2012, activists from Occupy Wall Street in New York organised a demonstration at UN headquarters. Dressed in suits and posing as corporate representatives, a small group gathered on the lawn outside the building with tents bearing the logos of Exxon Mobil, BP and other large transnational corporations. At one point, these »representatives« from Bank of America addressed the crowd, congratulating themselves on their company's participation in the upcoming Rio conference and declaring that, »the most exciting news of the day is that we have accepted UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon's invitation to permanently occupy the UN climate conference.« Police eventually arrested five protesters.

As Occupy's action illustrates, the social movements that emerged in the wake of the economic crisis are sceptical of the UN's capacity to be a space to conceive and enact the changes that are needed. Both the governance model proposed by the UN, in particular the prominent role it gives to the corporate sector, and the type of solutions that it is putting forward, beg the question: is the organisation up to the task of building an alternative model, or even serving as a forum to discuss new models?

Some NGOs, seeing multi-stakeholder governance as an opportunity for more participation and influence in policy processes, have gone along with this model. Yet an acceptance that the corporate sector has a role to play in sustainable development is not the same as an endorsement of its centrality. Without a critical examination of its likely impact on the delivery of public goods, social inclusion and ecological sustainability – and without strong (not voluntary) mechanisms to hold it accountable – any pronouncement on the exact role of the private sector is premature. In the absence of such an accountability

framework, some NGOs have found themselves aligned with outcomes that are at odds with their values and mandate.

While the UN enthusiastically embraces the corporate sector as part of the solution (without acknowledging how it may also be part of the problem), many other NGOs, CSOs and social movements are reassessing the role that the UN needs to play to achieve truly transformative change. For progressive social movements, it may be a short step to concluding that the UN is, in fact, not irrelevant but nevertheless very much part of the problem. By embracing transnational corporations as partners, the UN risks legitimising the idea that there is no alternative to a free-market, privatised world. While one should be mindful of painting the UN with too broad a brush, this shift is undoubtedly affecting the system as a whole, including the Secretariat, the funds and programs and the specialised agencies.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and multi-stakeholder governance models tend to favour well-established and well-resourced players, and they often focus on technical solutions. Although some argue that every effort is useful, even if it does not challenge the system, others counter that initiatives taking place within PPPs and multi-stakeholder models merely take the pressure away from what really needs to be done.

PPPs can allow states to outsource their responsibilities and obligations to civil society and the private sector while pleading impotence. Although promoted as complementary to governmental efforts, multi-stakeholder partnerships often become replacements for intergovernmental initiatives, especially in areas where the difficulty of achieving international agreement results in governance gaps. These multi-stakeholder initiatives, however, often lack transparent reporting requirements and while they claim billions of dollars in pledges and investments, it is usually difficult to assess where money has gone, whether it is »additional,« and what its impact on policy direction might be. PPPs act as so-called »coalitions of the willing« – but they need to be answerable to agreed frameworks, in particular international human rights instruments and environmental treaties.

If governance models promote »partnerships« and »consensus« without recognising the power imbalances between stakeholders and the interests invested in the status quo, then consultations and dialogues are likely to lead to more of the same with only minor changes and, therefore, reinforce the imbalance. In this context, social movements are concerned that, if they participate, they will be co-opted into legitimising processes resulting in outcomes that they do not support.

These issues are not specific to UN processes. Indeed they reflect broader tensions between social movements and more traditional NGOs as well as deep-rooted disagreements on the best strategy to effect change. For social movements and radical organisations, lobbying policy processes through professional campaigns disconnected from people's struggles cannot achieve transformative change and may lead to co-optation.

Open processes, consultations and dialogue are, of course, valuable, and the UN has a good track record when it comes to developing spaces for the participation of civil society and social movements. However, UN processes also tend to put too much emphasis on input. The last section of this paper explores modalities for better engagement and participation, in particular by allowing alternative policies and dissent not only to be expressed, but also respected and recorded.

Ultimately, the consultation/dialogue model is limited if it posits that, with enough information on the consequences of their decisions, policymakers will come to a rational conclusion beneficial to all. It bears stating that economic policies are not implemented because decision-makers do not realise their harmful effect on people and the environment. These are not »mistakes.« Instead they are very deliberate choices answering to powerful interests. Having a voice in the process, while key, is not enough to challenge these outcomes. As a member of La Via Campesina has put it: »Just having arguments, good points in the big conferences, that is not enough. That model is limited in itself. We mobilise ourselves socially to destabilise this train that has no brakes and is rushing forward.« The possibility of holding powerful interests accountable, and not just debating with them, is key.

3. A Forum to Challenge Power?

Is the UN still the best thing we have to achieve a more just and sustainable world? In 2010, the French activist organisation ATTAC argued in favour of, »another UN

for another world.« ATTAC stressed the UN's role as the repository of human rights-based international legal instruments – a legal framework that powerful, ad-hoc fora such as the G20 do not possess.

While not shying away from what has gone wrong in the past few years, one can also acknowledge the UN's history as a political organising space marked by major achievements. When the UN was established in 1945, almost a third of the world's population lived in non-self-governing territories dependent on colonial powers. The UN played an important role in bringing about independence and upholding the principle of self-determination.

Human rights treaties, starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly in 1948, are another important contribution of the UN to the struggle for equality and social justice. Most recently, the UN Secretary-General's report on the post-2015 Agenda, »A life of dignity for all,« reaffirmed that food, shelter, clean water and sanitation, basic health services and education are all human rights. Human rights treaties set and confirm standards for accountability that can be used by organisations engaged in activism to contest existing power structures. The human rights system puts issues that have been marginalised – such as the rights of women, people with disabilities and indigenous peoples – on the agenda, making it easier for organisations and social movements to demand progress and accountability. These treaties transform the discourse from respect for a set of rights to coming into compliance with international standards.

The 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and its affirmation of the concept of »free, prior and informed consent« (first introduced by the ILO), are for instance being used by indigenous peoples to challenge resource extraction projects, including an ongoing fight against a colossal open-pit copper and gold mine in Alaska. The Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2008) is effectively used by people to influence and improve local services.

In the US, a nationwide movement is working to implement the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in local communities in the face of federal resistance to ratification of the treaty (the US is one of the few countries which has not ratified CEDAW).

At the UN, ten human rights treaty bodies have been created to monitor implementation of the core international human rights treaties. All states parties are obliged to submit regular reports to the Committees on how the rights are being implemented. Individuals can lodge complaints about the violation of their rights in some of these bodies, which can also initiate inquiries into serious or systematic violations of the conventions in a state party. The UN Special Rapporteurs – on the Right to Food, Indigenous Peoples' Rights, the Right to Health, et cetera – perform similar functions. These are all important mechanisms that social movements can effectively mobilise to hold their governments accountable.

In spite of its recent turn towards the corporate sector and its embrace of market-led solutions, the UN remains the international forum friendliest to groups seeking to challenge the global concentration of power. Some parts of the UN have proven open to and supportive of alternative concepts and models. The UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS) have all worked to promote the Social and Solidarity Economy, a development model based on cooperation, complementarity and mutual support that has gained traction in Brazil, Ecuador, France and other countries.

The organisation has also created many spaces where critical individuals and organisations can organise and express their views. These include, for instance, the Indigenous Peoples' Forum and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in Rome. At the CFS, the autonomous Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) is designed to let farmers' movements and grassroots organisations represent themselves and bring their own solutions to the process, giving them (and the private sector!) participation rights on par with those of states. Many UN processes recognise diversity, but the diversity in input is not always reflected in the outcome.

UN spaces have long been used by organisations and movements not only to interact with member states, but also to self-organise and build connections with each other. Side-events organised around UN events and »counter events« such as the People's Summit at the Rio

2012 Conference, are all useful fora to voice alternative views and build global networks.

4. Time for an Ambitious Agenda

The post-2015 development agenda can be an opportunity to reclaim values-based multilateralism at the UN, to move beyond a development policy geared towards making the current system better, and towards truly transformative change. The UN is the only place to hold all players accountable to universal standards and responsibilities, and to promote a values-based framework for sustainable development rooted in the UN Charter and human rights instruments.

This direction is possible if the UN stops favouring stakeholders whose interest is only to tinker at the edges of the system. Instead, the involvement of stakeholders who are not risk-averse and who promote and defend a values-based, rights-based approach to development, including social movements, is crucial.

A Better Space for Alternatives at the UN

The UN has established many best practices for the participation of civil society and social movements. However, these best practices are often seen as a menu to choose from rather than standards that should not be regressed from. More consistent application of these best practices could help build a better institutional model for engagement. This would in turn highlight the fact that multi-stakeholder dialogues and consultations can indeed challenge the status quo and bring alternative policies forward. Such practices would also help to:

- Promote a diversity of views, including social movements and people most affected who have so far been marginalised. While these people cannot automatically be assumed to be democratic and progressive, they are often representatives of communities that can bring alternative views to the table. The experience of people on the ground is a form of expertise that is just as relevant to the post-2015 process as the expertise of the scientific and academic community.

- Better feature local experiences to inform policymaking debates at UN headquarters. Contributions from CSOs and social movements do not only take the form of direct participation in processes. However, their innovative experience at the local or national level is not recognised in processes that adopt a hierarchical, top-down interpretation of global decision-making.

- Build an institutional environment that moves beyond so-called »consultations« and »consensus« to allow the expression of dissent and alternative views. This would counter the worst aspects of the multi-stakeholder model, which tends to focus on weak areas of agreement rather than tackle difficult issues. The post-2015 process should give a space and recognition to the expression of alternative and confrontational views and not force civil society to speak in one consensual voice. Dissenting positions should be respected and clearly recorded in official proceedings and documents. This is especially necessary when »civil society« becomes a misnomer that includes representatives of the corporate sector and of private philanthropic foundations.

- Recognise and address the power imbalances between stakeholders. Giving more time to people on the ground and social movements to speak, make their positions known, and present alternative policies can rebalance the power dynamics. That time is especially important for groups that are looking for recognition of their constituency at the global level (such as indigenous peoples).

Accountability

Good modalities for engagement are a step in the right direction but not enough: a successful post-2015 development agenda also demands policy and political changes. The question is not only whether participation in policy processes reflects diversity and alternative views; the process must also be able to challenge power structures responsible for the status quo, and people at the local and national levels must ultimately be able to support its outcome. Both people on the ground and social movements support the UN when they see it as a credible forum to remove global obstacles to justice and sustainability that cannot be tackled nationally, and to set norms and standards that will help and support national level rights-based mobilisation. Without necessarily directly participating in UN processes, these movements can play a key role in engaging their national governments to

push for change and implement policies negotiated at the global level. But they are not likely to do so if they see UN policies as one more barrier to achieving social justice and protecting the commons.

A new accountability framework, rather than a new partnership for development, should be the priority on the post-2015 development agenda. Accountability can ensure that the interests of stakeholders, especially of the most powerful players, are truly aligned with the purpose they are claiming to be working towards and do not contradict the values-based standards of the organisation. Transparency and accountability standards should of course also be applied to NGOs, CSOs and social movements. However, in the current context, the UN and member states have generally submitted civil society to more intense scrutiny than the corporate sector. While organisations applying for ECOSOC accreditation have to be approved by member states, there is no equivalent accreditation process for corporations independent of the business associations they may belong to. Further, many individual states have enacted draconian legislation that seriously limits the capacity of their citizens to organise as CSOs and to demonstrate, while transnational corporations rarely encounter the same difficulties.

To rebalance the power relations, the UN should focus on accountability for the corporate sector.

At the very least, the UN should establish better public disclosure and conflict of interest policies to regulate corporate sector engagement. In the current system, international business associations can participate in UN processes as NGOs on the basis that they are nonprofit, even though they represent the interests of their corporate members. Public interest NGOs have long called on the World Health Organization (WHO) to classify private-sector actors outside of its NGO category, to better make the distinction between Public Interest NGOs (PINGOs) and Business Interest NGOs (BINGOs). Such distinction could be made system wide.

Better public disclosure and conflict of interest policies are also needed for the UN itself. The organisation should disclose financial contributions from the corporate sector (including in the form of extra-budgetary resources) and establish a clear framework for interacting with the private sector and managing conflicts of interest, in particular by differentiating between policy development and appropriate involvement in implementation. Protection for whistleblowers would ensure that UN staff can speak out on practices that do not conform to the mandate and values of the organisation. Specific language in the code of ethics for UN employees could also help address the potential issues raised by the circulation of staff between UN entities and national governments, private foundations, corporations, lobby groups and CSOs.

Progressive NGOs, CSOs and social movements can advocate and lobby for such changes. They can also challenge the UN to rethink how it has adopted the language and worldview of the corporate sector. What does it mean when the organisation promotes health, education and even people as good »returns on investment«? When it argues that sustainable development needs to be sold to the corporate sector as »more profitable« to save us from disaster?

Such changes can only happen if member states start debating this issue more vigorously. What kind of space do they want to build for the post-2015 development agenda? Many governments have supported the UN's embrace of the corporate sector while others have remained silent. Some have adopted double standards, letting the private sector in while keeping civil society at bay on the grounds that the inter-governmental nature of the organisation should be preserved. Furthermore, governments sympathetic to social movements at home have sometimes failed to show the same openness at the UN. Are there opportunities for member states and civil society to work together to build an alternative to a multi-stakeholder governance model that privileges the corporate sector? A recent initiative in the Human Rights Council, spearheaded by Ecuador and supported by more than eighty governments and dozens of CSOs, proposes to advance a binding instrument to regulate transnational corporations. Could this be an indication that the discourse on the role of the corporate sector is shifting?

5. Conclusion

The UN has so far seemed to assume that cooperation with large transnational corporations would help it regain relevance. This trend has accelerated in the context of discussions and negotiations around the post-2015 development agenda. The challenges that the UN ad-

dresses – poverty eradication, climate change mitigation and adaptation, a shift to sustainable production and consumption practices – require nothing less than radical changes. But the organisations' corporate partners (and the powerful states that advocate in their favour) are generally happy to support UN efforts only as long as they fall into the realm of acceptable discourse.

The UN is reflecting, rather than driving, many of the trends in the current world order. But the organisation does have the potential to be a space where this order can be challenged, and the processes for the post-2015 development agenda offer a window of opportunity. The post-2015 agenda cannot be limited to allowing stakeholders to debate future goals and establish partnerships based on weak areas of agreement that avoid difficult issues. Rather, the post-2015 process provides an opportunity to reclaim the UN's values-based framework, challenge the powerful interests and politics that have led to the current situation, and hold all players accountable.

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Dialogue on Globalization

As part of the international work of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Dialogue on Globalization contributes worldwide to the debate on globalization and global governance. It is based on the premise that – through an inclusive and responsive global policy approach – globalization can be shaped into a direction that promotes peace, democracy and social justice. The program draws intensely on the international network of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung – a German non-profit institution committed to the principles of social democracy with offices, programs and partners in more than 100 countries. Dialogue on Globalization addresses »movers and shakers« both in developing countries and in the industrialized parts of the world. The program is coordinated by the head office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Berlin and by the FES offices in New York and Geneva.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung office in New York serves as a liaison between the United Nations, FES field offices and partners in developing countries to strenghten the voice of the Global South. It contributes to UN debates on economic and social development, and on peace and security issues. Towards this end, FES New York annually organizes some 30 seminars, conferences and round-tables and regularly publishes briefing papers and fact sheets. In addition, it contributes to a dialogue on the work of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in Washington, DC.
The New York office is located in close proximity to the United Nations headquarters. The office has four permanent staff members and provides internships for students specializing in international affairs, development and economic policy.

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