

Global Thematic Consultation on the Post-2015 Development Agenda
ADDRESSING INEQUALITIES Synthesis Report of Global Public Consultation:
Overview and key messages

13 March 2013

The *Global Thematic Consultation on Addressing Inequalities in the Post-2015 Development Agenda* was held under the auspices of the United Nations Development Group in the period from September 2012 to January 2013, using on-line facilities at the home page www.worldwewant2015.org/inequalities.

Overview and Key Messages

1. Equality was identified as a *fundamental value* in the Millennium Declaration, adopted by the Member States of the United Nations at the turn of the century in 2000.
2. The obligation to address inequalities is born from the principles and standards of the international *human rights treaties* which have been widely adopted in the last several decades, as well as from *human values* shared across continents and cultures.
3. *Translating equality* and the other fundamental values of the Millennium Declaration more systematically and effectively *into practice* will be crucial to sustaining progress and improving the wellbeing of both today's and all future generations.
4. *Inequalities are a global challenge*. They persist both within all countries and between them. Similar kinds of inequalities are faced in common by people across the world.
5. Inequalities are not just problems for the people whose lives are most directly affected – those most disadvantaged and excluded. They have deep consequences for everyone in society. *Inequalities harm us all*. Among these consequences are: reductions in the pace and sustainability of economic growth; diminishment of the productive potential of all who are harmed and excluded, and the loss of this potential to society; the worsening of existing fragilities and vulnerabilities, including to conflict and disasters; and the weakening of social cohesion and of security for all. Addressing inequalities is not only the right thing in principle, but also vital in ensuring that we have a sustainable and peaceful world.
6. Since the Millennium Declaration was adopted, *many* types of inequalities have *worsened*, in a period when the Millennium Development Goals did not focus systematically on trends "*beneath the averages*". Even where human development progress has been rapid in aggregate terms, particular inequalities have often persisted or become more severe. Increased global access to technology and social media has highlighted the extent of inequalities, driving awareness and increasing demand for change.
7. There is no "level playing field" either within or between countries. Market economies and all that they influence are *asymmetric*, favouring the interests of those who already have an advantage. Furthermore, where

policies have sought to replace public provision of basic social needs with market-based approaches, outcomes have often disadvantaged the poorest and most-marginalized groups.

8. The challenges of unequal access to the *natural resources* --which are essential for survival, wellbeing and economic activities -- and of vulnerabilities to environmental degradation and climate change, have also become more severe. These have both exacerbated existing inequalities and have raised new and critical risks for often already-disadvantaged groups of people and countries.

9. Inequalities predominantly affect individuals and groups suffering *multiple* human rights deprivations. Typically, marginalized and excluded groups lag behind in the enjoyment of one particular right due to lack of access to *other rights* such as decent jobs, food, housing, health, sexual and reproductive health rights, information, education, participation, physical integrity or judicial remedies. Multiple deprivation and inequalities are often closely associated with and reinforced by *specific forms of discrimination* in the enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Examples include, but are not limited to, discrimination related to: gender, age, caste, race, ethnic and indigenous identity, minority status, (dis)ability, place of residence, marital and family status, HIV status, and sexual orientation.

10. Inequalities are also deeply entrenched by *structural drivers and barriers* in the economic, social, political, cultural and environmental domains. These drivers intersect and can have *cumulative, mutually-reinforcing effects* that lead to the systematic disadvantage of some social groups and to the perpetuation of poverty and exclusion from generation to generation.

11. These intersections do not just add up to a simple sum of the various dimensions of inequality. Where different forms of inequality overlap, they reinforce each other and create unique forms of discrimination and exclusion. Policies, programs and interventions which are intended to improve the lives of disadvantaged people often directly address the *symptoms* of inequalities - such as chronic poverty - but not their *causes*. Their impact and effectiveness are likely to be undermined by the structural drivers that perpetuate inequalities. As a result, patterns of powerlessness, marginalization and exclusion are often strongly persistent over time.

12. Inequalities are commonly "*legitimised*" by powerful groups using *stereotypes and prejudice* that justify discrimination and maintain exclusion. For example, poor people are still widely supposed to be lazy or responsible for their own poverty. Ethnic minorities and migrants are deemed to be intruders or "free riders" on the rest of society. The rights of persons with disabilities are dismissed as the expensive demands of unproductive people. Adolescents and young people are often denied access to sexuality education because of prevailing views around marriage. Old people are seen as a burden on society and public funds; and children are still often treated as a "residual" group, provisions for whom are a matter of charity or discretion, rather than as the very foundation of future productivity and citizenship.

13. *Gender-based discrimination* -- including the denial of the rights of women and girls, and their disempowerment to take control of their lives and bodies -- remains the *single most widespread driver of inequalities* in today's world. Gender-based violence, taking many forms, is a major element of this massive and continuing failure of human rights. This and other harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child

and forced marriage continue to perpetuate the subordination of girls and women to men, and act as a barrier in allowing them to develop their full potential.

14. A major part of existing inequalities results from *unequal control over assets*. These include natural resources as well as productive and financial assets. The increasing concentration of all such assets in a shrinking proportion of the population needs to be countered by explicit policies seeking more equal distribution, including fairer distribution of the rents from natural resources.

15. Efforts to reduce inequalities will require strong consensus at all levels, and large scale policies that reach from the local to the national to the global. These efforts will require appropriate *policy and legal frameworks, actions to protect people from discrimination and leveling-up measures* to enable those whose capabilities have been harmed by inequalities to claim and realize their rights. Successful measures will not be “piecemeal”, but rather require a broad-based economic and social policy framework that is oriented towards inequality reduction. This in turn requires measures that are *transformational* in orientation rather than just marginal or incremental.

16. Policy reform must be accompanied by concerted action to *address negative social attitudes* and build a universal demand for equality, tolerance and social justice. Attitudinal change is required at all levels, and across all generations.

17. Transformative change towards a more equal and inclusive world, and the eradication of poverty in all its forms, will depend on *coherent global and national policy action* in and across the economic, social, environmental and political domains.

18. A development framework will be needed that is based on the recognition that all people have rights, and that *incorporates and reflects the human rights principles* of universality and non-discrimination, participation and accountability, if the structural drivers of inequalities are to be fully addressed in future.

19. *Some countries have made significant progress* in addressing the structural drivers of inequalities and reducing their impact, through a range of *equity-focused and rights-based policy, legal and programme initiatives* which they have kept in place over time. These include: explicit measures to provide for equal access and opportunity for disadvantaged and excluded groups; appropriate redistributive measures, including social protection; provision for the specific needs of women and girls, children, persons with disabilities and minority groups; adequate and sustained investment in children, including adolescents, as a means of combatting inequality and promoting future prosperity; early childhood development interventions focused explicitly on families affected by low income and deprivations; and measures to increase awareness, widen participation in decision-making and improve the availability and transparency of data and information on inequalities and development progress.

20. *Macroeconomic policy* is also key to addressing inequalities. Fiscal policies, particularly tax policies, that seek to improve collection from sectors and agents that have benefited disproportionately from aggregate income growth can provide adequate resources for redistribution, without necessarily requiring higher tax rates.

Similarly, better and more effective implementation of existing tax laws can be effective. The growing international consensus on the need for *equitable tax systems* is very welcome in this respect.

21. The *post-2015 international development framework* should be *universal* in nature, in order to tackle the global challenge of inequalities. As part of the new framework, goals that aspire to "*getting to zero*" -- in terms of conditions such as poverty, violence, preventable deaths, malnutrition and denial of basic service access -- will assist in moving towards the realization of human rights for all.

22. A *self-standing global goal on inequalities* should be included in the post-2015 development framework. This should not be limited to economic inequalities but should also address other key dimensions, with *particular focus on gender inequalities and gender-related discrimination*. A self-standing goal on inequalities should be *complemented*, across all goal areas of the framework, *by targets and indicators that focus* on the situation of the most disadvantaged groups, and on the major drivers of inequalities in the economic, social, environmental, cultural and/or political domains. In these ways, success will be gauged by the progress made among the worst-off groups and individuals.

23. The *adaptation* of future global goals to national targets and indicators should be the result of *inclusive and highly participatory processes* where disadvantaged people, inter alia including children and young people, engage in matters that concern them. Meaningful participation will be supported by measures to strengthen the capacity and coverage of national and sub-national *monitoring and evaluation, data collection and analysis*. These will need to track the impact of policies, legislation, budgets and programmes among those most disadvantaged and excluded; allow for truly participatory assessment of these measures; enable much more systematic disaggregation of information for equity-focused targets and indicators; and provide mechanisms for *locally-led citizen monitoring and feedback* on progress and performance. Such components of a new framework, together, will provide the basis for well-informed and transparent policy-making.

24. Last and not least: *accountability* among decision-makers and public institutions, supported by systems such as those above, will be an essential feature of just and equitable human progress and the realization of human rights. Accountability will be central both to the design and implementation of future policies and actions that address inequalities, and to ensuring a new Development Framework in which people of all social groups, ages and circumstances are truly partners and participants.