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DISCUSSION NOTE
From post 1945 to post 2015

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Global development post 1945, until the end of the twentieth century, did not take place smoothly. After World War II, economic reconstruction had to be taken in hand. Major events followed: the breaking out of a Cold War between East and West and its ending 40 years later; liberation wars; decolonization; emergence of new economies; civil wars in new nation states; extensive use of fossil fuels and nuclear energy; application of new technologies in information, transportation and communication; development of weapons of mass destruction; rise of transnational companies in all economic sectors, in particular in finance, just to name a few. The global development road was bumpy. The road map had to be redrawn frequently because the sketches never fully reflected realities on the ground. Roadblocks emerged due to changing economic and political power relations.

Post 1945

Before World War II, powerful countries could freely steer the course of world development. However, since the establishment of the United Nations this freedom had been curtailed. Global consensus had been reached with regard to some basic principles and values which should be observed, in order to avoid the road straying into a jungle or abyss. Those principles led to agreement about rules, which should be observed by all, serving the common interest of the peoples on the earth. These principles and rules were partly based on emerging global ethics and partly on rational thought: non-observance of rules by some parties could result in irreversible damage for all, and even self-destruction.

The emerging consensus was laid down in a new road map for global development, with agreed principles and rules, procedures for decision-making, policy objectives, and instruments. The first of these was the Charter of the United Nations, followed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For a large number of specific policy areas, rules and procedures were entrusted to UN Specialized Agencies and the Organizations of the Bretton Woods System. Their scope was meant to be worldwide in order to ensure a global level playing field. However, it soon turned out that newly independent countries were disadvantaged due to their colonial past and also to their different economic circumstances and cultures. In the 1960s, this recognition led to the adoption of a Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) in addition to Civil and Political Rights. Moreover, specific roadmaps were drawn in order to enable so-called developing countries to bridge the gap with the former colonial empires and other rich countries: the Strategies for the First, Second, and Third Development Decades (the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s).

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Though the policy objectives of these strategies in terms of macroeconomic growth and diversification of sectors were rather ambitious, the aspirations of developing countries were much higher. In the 1960s, this resulted in international negotiations concerning far-reaching principles and rules for international trade and finance, which should facilitate temporal preferential treatment of poorer and other developing countries in order to guarantee a real level playing field (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, UNCTAD, Geneva, 1964). In the 1970s, almost all former colonies had become independent nation states, outnumbering the richer countries in the Northern part of the world. The South, not satisfied with slow progress during the United Nations Development Decades and disappointed about the results of UNCTAD, called for a more ambitious roadmap: the so-called New International Economic Order (NIEO). The US Secretary of State had declared: 'The present economic system has served the world well', but a large part of that world felt that in particular the financial and trade relations within that system had only served the industrialized countries. During Special Sessions of the General Assembly of the United Nations (in 1974 and 1975) near to global consensus on the need to establish a NIEO was reached, but the implementation met stiff obstruction. Schemes that had been elaborated in order to deal with the main problems of developing countries in those years (instability of both commodity markets and financial markets, resulting in indebtedness and deficient export revenues) got stifled at birth. These sketches of a better roadmap for global development, based on the consensus of the 1940s and the supplements to this consensus which were agreed to face new developments threating world peace had a couple of characteristics in common. Though the successive sketches reflected changing power relations and different political views, all of them embodied a top-down approach to development and demonstrated a bias in favor of economic rather than social dimensions. All sketches were based on the assumption, first, that there were no limits to growth, and, second, that ultimately macro growth would result in raising the level of living of everybody. However, both assumptions increasingly met criticism. The first assumption was criticized by, amongst others, the Club of Rome, in a path-breaking report 'Limits to Growth'. The second assumption increasingly met criticism from development economists such as Paul Streeten and Mahbub Ul Haq, who carried out research on poverty and also served as advisers to the UN. Both criticisms found a platform within the same UN, where the disputed roadmaps had been drawn. In the 1970s, this led to a path breaking declaration to protect and improve the human environment, and to preserve the non-renewable natural resources of the earth, in order to guarantee a life of dignity and well-being to all people, including future generations (United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 1972). In the same decade, many special United Nations conferences took place which resulted in declarations and agreements concerning specific aspects of people's development: the World Food Conference (Rome, 1974), the World Population Conference (Bucharest, 1974), the World Conference on Women (Mexico, 1975), the World Employment Conference (Geneva, 1976) and the International Conference on Primary Health Care (Alma Ata, 1978). All these declarations could be seen as revisions of previous roadmaps for global development. Though dealing with different, but interrelated, sectors, they had a basic idea in common: development is people's development and global development, next to economic growth of countries and political self-reliance of nations, it requires first and foremost meeting the basic human needs of people, their survival, well-being, dignity, health, nutrition, basic education and employment.

In retrospect, it was a miracle that during those three turbulent decades of global development, it was possible, time and again, to reach agreement within the United Nations on significant refinements and revisions of the road map. Political, economic and ideological differences between countries prevailed. However, the United Nations system, once established, was capable of directing global discussions toward agreement on new principles and objectives in

order to deal with newly emerging bottlenecks and to ensure that global development would not exclude large parts of the world's population.

Agreement was reached indeed, at least in theory. Practical implementation of principles and objectives was deficient, however. But within the United Nations, injured parties had an option to use agreed procedures to appeal and protest. This also is an important function of the UN: serving as a platform based on agreed procedures to discuss world realities, to highlight shortcomings and non-implementation, to provide a forum for appeal, to design new answers, principles and objectives, to propose new rules and procedures, to facilitate talks about possible new agreements amongst nation states and to mobilize world civil society for all of this.

The 1980s were a period of stagnation: a debt crisis, mounting unemployment, adjustment to these new economic realities, budgetary cuts across the board, and the threat of a new arms race. In many countries, this resulted in embracing efficiency, rather than equity and solidarity, as guiding principles, and in a weakening of the spirit of international cooperation. Both in the UN and in world civil society, pleas were made in favor of alternative values and principles. Within the UN, 'adjustment with a human face' was advocated as an alternative to cutting the very public and social services which in the 1970s had been recognized as crucial preconditions for meeting basic human needs. The Brandt Commission, in a report on North–South relations in the world economy, spoke about interdependence in a global neighborhood, a common crisis, and common responsibilities for common survival. The Palme Commission, dealing with international security issues, used a similar terminology: common security as a blueprint for survival based on notions not of common security, but instead of national security. The Brundtland Commission, discussing global environmental risks, coined the concept of sustainable development: 'development, that meets the needs of present people without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. The need to render development sustainable led to a new principle: sustainability, an essential precondition to be met in order to safeguard a common future.

However, the new concepts and alternative models did not receive much applause from policy-makers. Commentators saw this period as a 'lost decade for development', a phrase coined by Gamani Corea, Secretary General of UNCTAD at that time. The UN launched a so-called New Round of Global Negotiations, but the talks came to a deadlock right from the beginning. Quite a few countries, in particular newly emerging economies such as Mexico, were hit by a severe debt crisis which lasted many years. Talks meant to agree on generally applicable solutions, instead of individual cases, faltered. But while North–South relations were stalemated, the end of the Cold War brought revolutionary change in East–West relations during the final years of the decade. The option of global sustainable development was saved by the bell. During the Cold War, imperialist powers in East and West had thwarted reforms in Southern countries, for fear that their geopolitical sphere of influence might be weakened by economic, political or ideological realignments. From now on, spheres of influence were no longer relevant concepts. The end of the Cold War implied ending the all-absorbing ideological confrontation between capitalism and socialism. Pulling down the Berlin Wall and tearing up the Iron Curtain led to a fading of frontiers everywhere. For the first time since 1945, this facilitated the establishment of a truly global open market for goods, services, data, money, finance and investment, technology, information and ideas. In all countries, vital reallocation of scarce resources could take place: instead of being swallowed by a never-ending arms race, finance would be within reach to reduce poverty and to preserve the environment, two major pillars of a policy aiming at sustainability.

As a student and later as a researcher in the 1960s, I had become enthusiastic about the signs of that time: a drive toward decolonization, democratization, development and emancipation. In the 1970s, as a politician, I was energized by ongoing international endeavors in favor of greater

equalities between and within countries, and by struggles for liberation and human rights. Sometimes we were disappointed, but many people felt that it was worthwhile to continue participating in the struggles, because we could also point at various successes that were achieved. However, in the 1980s, many people felt frustrated by the complete paralysis of global development. In those years, I had joined the UN. As an international civil servant, I witnessed political insensitivity to the needs of the poor and negligence of public concerns. But the turn of the decade thereafter was met by a sigh of relief, both by activists in civil society and by many political leaders in East, West and South. I remember those years as re-energizing and very optimistic.

Post 1989

That was particularly true for the period from 1989 to 1992, the year in which the United Nations World Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) took place in Rio de Janeiro. It was really an Earth Summit, bringing together more world leaders and also more representatives of world civil society than ever before. The issues on the agenda were new. The spirit was different. The way in which people were communicating was different as well. It was the first world conference where people were using mobile phones to communicate with each other and also with the world outside. The outcome was a sea change compared with declarations produced by international conferences since the end of the 1970s. The principles proclaimed by the Rio Declaration provided a new basis for action. The agenda for action in order to lay the basis for global sustainable development in twenty-first century (*Agenda 21*) was inspiring. Students, scientists, politicians, opinion leaders and civil society activists were mobilized to think out of the box, to produce creative ideas and to cooperate beyond the frontiers of the past. It was in this spirit that, for instance, the idea was launched to draft a consensus-based Earth Charter. Until today, this Charter has helped to shape the mindset of successive generations of opinion leaders and policy-makers.

Shortly before the beginning of those three years, I had returned to politics. I remember the expectations floating around: a 'world of difference' was ahead of us. However, I also remember the disappointments which followed, not only because of very slow implementation of agreed new policy principles and objectives, but also because the new notion of sustainability soon seemed to be swept aside by a the ideological values of those who claimed to have won the Cold War: an unfounded and sheer metaphysical belief in the superiority of market forces, which formed the basis of a new victorious consensus – the so-called Washington consensus. This belief led to a kind of new international governance ethics, which implied not only that market mechanisms must direct allocations in the real economy, but also that they must be leading in finance, including development finance, and in the social sectors which hitherto had functioned within the public domain. The idea was that free markets would go hand in hand with political democracy. However, the absolute preponderance of a free and unrestricted market mechanism implies, first, that external effects of market behavior – such as consequences for the natural environment, the earth's biodiversity, and its climate – will be disregarded. Second, this neo-liberal belief in the primacy of the market, regardless of the economic power relations on the market and the political power relations in democracy, will take for granted the inequalities which result from the workings of the mechanism, and thus will shut the eyes to poverty. Both consequences of neo-liberalism stood at right angles to the two pillars of a policy aiming at sustainability: poverty eradication and ecological preservation.

The 1990s were a decade of new ideological confrontation, despite Fukuyama's claim that an end point had been reached in mankind's ideological evolution, due to total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism. Indeed, many people were convinced about the irreversible universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final and superior form of

governance. This conviction gave shape to a new phase of globalization, which was basically led by Western capitalism. It was an economic process, driven by commercial and technological forces and facilitated by broad political agreement that in all countries economic growth should come first – in North, East, West and South. This was a logical sequel to the consensus of the previous decade, to give precedence to adjustment to the realities of economic decline. Effective adjustment and substantive growth would both require open markets for investment and trade, to be negotiated within the frameworks of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the Paris Club of creditor nations.

However, at the same time, the requirements of poverty reduction and environmental care were put on the agenda of negotiations in the framework of the UN. Analogous to the 1970s, a series of special conferences was held in order to deal with various aspects of international development. The most important ones were the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), the World Summit on Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995), the World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), the World Food Summit (Rome, 1996), and the World Climate Change Conference (Kyoto, 1997). Similar conferences had taken place in the 1980s, but these had merely reflected the stalemate of that period. However, the talks in the 1990s reflected new insights and resulted in meaningful consensus. This was helped by discussions in the UN proper, on new global Agendas proposed by UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali and following Agenda 21: the *Agenda for Peace* (1992), the *Agenda for Development* (1994) and the *Agenda for Democratization* (1996). These conference declarations and international agendas together helped to find consensus about new concepts, such as 'human development'; 'human security'; 'the right to development'; 'women's empowerment'; 'food security'; 'physical access by all, at all times, to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe food'; 'a precautionary approach'; 'the need to address social problems, especially poverty, unemployment and *social exclusion* that affect every country'; and 'common but differentiated responsibilities for environmental degradation'. Strictly speaking, not all these concepts were new. Many had been debated for years. But in the 1990s, some form of basic consensus agreement was reached on a set of new values, as countervailing power against neoliberal principles. Whether this countervailing power would be effective remained to be seen: the same governments that had joined the consensus were involved in talks about the implementation of the neo-liberal track following the Washington consensus.

As said above, I had been quite optimistic during the early years of the new decade. Gradually, this optimism wavered. The implementation of the agreed Rio principles was hindered by commercial and transnational powers of globalization, lobbying and pressuring governments to do the opposite of what had been agreed. Moreover, post-1989 global development was increasingly thwarted by civil wars. As indicated above, the end of the Cold War had implied that both the US and Russia were no longer concerned about their sphere of influence in the South. Neither of these was any more interested in manipulating or suppressing change within countries of the South. However, this positive development in geopolitics meant that long-existing and new conflicts within Southern countries now could easily become manifest and escalate, often violently. The spread of these violent conflicts, which led to numerous victims and even genocide, was another reason why in the mid-1990s the new spirit of sustainable development was fading away.

In an essay written during those years, I expressed thorough disappointment about the state of affairs concerning international development cooperation. I argued that the actual practice could be qualified neither as development nor as cooperation. Though I did not want to go as far as stating that the 1990s were another lost decade for development, I argued that, at best, it

would turn out to be a decade of transition. In these years, a basis could be laid for sustainable development and sincere cooperation in the decade ahead, the first decade of the new century.

My criticism was not fully justified. Looking back at the last decade of the previous millennium, we may conclude that important steps forward were taken regarding new values and principles, as had been advocated in the various Agendas mentioned above. Alternatives to the forces of market globalization were launched and often agreed, anyway in theory. Implementation, however, remained deficient. Though we seemed to be running in the right direction, we were running behind the facts, and the gap became bigger and bigger.

A new millennium

Many UN documents are compromise texts, middle of the road, and uninspiring. That had been the case in particular during the 1980s. Agenda 21 had ushered in a new era. The UN had once again taken a lead, analyzing global trends and risks, coining new values and principles, stressing priorities and urgencies, and showing people a way out of conflict and decline. The guiding principles, which repeatedly had been endorsed, remained empty, because corresponding action did not follow.

However, at the turn of that period, in the year 2000, a new political momentum emerged. It was the turning year not only of decades, but also of centuries, even millennia. Though market forces and geopolitical power relations are not influenced by a mere calendar arithmetic, the end of the century created an ideal political opportunity to look both back and forward, and take a longer view. A kind of quadruple New Year's Eve feeling forced opinion leaders and politicians to wonder what had gone wrong, when, where and why, and how negative trends could be reversed.

This is what UN Secretary General Kofi Annan had asked them to do. In an insightful report, *We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the Twenty First Century*, aiming to mobilize both public opinion and political leaders, he had called the arrival of the new millennium an occasion not only for celebration, but also for reflection. 'There is much to be grateful for … There are also many things to deplore, and to correct'. His report was a call for reflection on ruthless conflict, degradation and disruption of nature's life-sustaining services, grinding poverty and striking inequality. Kofi Annan spoke about the need to ensure the survival of the human species. It was a call for action, with many concrete proposals in all domains.

On that basis, Heads of State and Government, called together in a so-called Millennium Summit meeting, presented the peoples of the world a *Millennium Declaration*. It was more than a reflection. It was an action program, based on introspection. It was understood that, given the prevailing ideological struggle between the moralities of neo-liberalism and sustainability, a new consensus concerning common objectives would require a redefinition of common values. Six categories of values were endorsed:

- Freedom: the right to live in dignity, free from hunger, fear, violence, oppression, or injustice, to be assured through democracy and participatory governance based on the will of the people themselves. (So, explicitly not: freedom of market powers)
- Equality of rights and opportunities, of both people and nations (rather than management-based efficiency first and foremost)
- Solidarity on the basis of equity and social justice (instead of maximization of private profit in the common interest)
- Tolerance: mutual respect between people, in all their diversity of belief, culture, and language, cherished as an asset of humanity (instead of cultural ranking on the basis of presumed excellence, and readiness to innovation and modernization)

- Respect for nature: prudent management of all living species and natural resources, to be passed on sustainably to other people, yet unborn (rather than the survival of the fittest).
- Shared responsibilities for managing global development, and threats to peace and security (and thus not, implicitly, the rightfulness of the use of violence to defend specific interests or for the sake of national or homeland security)

So, at the beginning of the new Millennium, two clarion calls were heard: the 'We the Peoples' plea – a wake-up call – and the Millennium Declaration, a call to arms and action.

The Millennium Declaration seemingly brought an end to the ideological confrontation between neo-liberal philosophies and sustainability ethics, in favor of the latter. The message was: 'the rising tide does not lift all boats; markets misjudge and distort real welfare; growth does not trickle down, and market-led growth can forge violence and destroy life chances of future generations'. This message, together with the agreed values, produced a program for common action.

The declaration anyway carried the language and style of such a program. The authors and signatories repeatedly used the terms: 'we resolve', and 'we will spare no effort', words which so often had been avoided by leaders bearing political responsibility. The new text demonstrated both shame and commitment.

The millennium development goals

It also demonstrated an awareness of the whole. In the years following the adoption of the Millennium Declaration, most attention has been given to the paragraphs concerning the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), selected in order to cut world poverty in half, in a period of 15 years. However, the objectives of the Millennium Declaration as a whole reached beyond poverty abatement. Those other objectives – for instance: halting climate change, desertification, and biosphere degradation; stopping unsustainable exploitation of water resources; peaceful resolution of disputes; ending illicit arms trade; ensuring human rights of migrants, minorities, and vulnerable groups; freeing the entire human race from want; establishing transparent international financial system – were crucial. They are important by themselves, and represent essential conditions for sustainable poverty reduction.

While since 1945 many of the world's people had experienced economic growth and progress, many others had stayed behind. They had been deprived of opportunities to share and enjoy the fruits of growth; many even had been excluded from reaping those fruits. The persistence of poverty amidst ever-increasing global wealth was not only the result of erroneous policies, based on the assumption that in the end, despite temporary lags, everybody would benefit from growth. The exclusion of people was to a large extent due to systemic failures, more than policy failures. Economic and political systems of countries were inherently flawed, unjust, biased against unprivileged people, who are powerless and poor. These systems are still flawed, and so is the global market system. Poor people are bound to remain poor because they are being denied fair access to the means necessary to empower themselves: capital, information, knowledge, credit, technology, water, a fertile soil, affordable energy, a safe habitat, and other necessary resources. Poverty is the result of a system that nurtures perverse power relations amongst people.

In the course of the 15-year period during which the MDGs would have to be accomplished, the criticism of these goals has increased. Surprisingly, stronger criticism has been directed at the MDGs as such, and the failure to fully meet them, than against the betrayal of commitments laid down in the Millennium Declaration as a whole. In my view, criticism of the MDGs is justified, but excessive. The nonobservance of the other commitments is more serious, and the silence is alarming.

The MDGs are political goals. As all other goals, they were the result of a political process, which included more or less objective needs assessments and cost–benefit analysis, and thus also compromises. Goals are never beyond dispute. However, for a number of reasons, the MDGs are better goals than any other target of global development policy since 1945.

The first reason is that the MDGs directly concern individual people's welfare, not the state of a national economy. For the first time since 1945, world consensus had been reached to aim at an improvement of the level of living of people directly, irrespective of economic growth. Poverty reduction would no longer have to depend on the rate of economic growth as a superior target, or on the acceptance of notions such as 'broad-based growth', or 'inclusive growth', or 'growth cum distribution'. Such notions are analytically helpful. However, in the Millennium Declaration, a more radical step has been made: economic growth is a second-order priority. Economic growth is not an exogenous target, but an endogenous variable. The rate of economic growth is subordinate to improving the living conditions of ever more people, in particular the poor.

Second, the MDGs define such an improvement in life circumstances of poor people no longer first and foremost in economic terms. They define people's welfare not only irrespective of national economic growth, but also as not primarily determined by an individual person's income. Income is important, but it does not represent welfare. It does so to a certain extent only. That is why the MDGs distinguish nine dimensions of poverty: (1) income poverty and (2) the rate of employment, (3) hunger and malnutrition, (4) access to primary education and literacy, (5) access of women to education and gainful employment, (6) child mortality, (7) maternal health, (8) prevalence of HIV/AIDs and death rates due to malaria and tuberculosis, and (9) access to drinking water and sanitation. Other dimensions and indicators of poverty could have been selected, but it cannot be denied that the set as a whole offers a truthful picture of people's welfare, its level, composition and shortcomings.

Third, the MDGs were quite ambitious. For the various dimensions and indicators of poverty, quantitative goals were set, which on average aimed at halving poverty in 15 years. If the ambition would not go beyond the first half of the world's poor, permanently disregarding the other half, this would have been disappointing. However, the Millennium Declaration clearly stated that the ultimate aim was to 'free the entire human race from want'. This can only be read as an aim to fully eradicate poverty. Halving poverty within a period of fifteen years had never before been accomplished. So, it definitely is an ambitious target. Moreover, it is the first phase. A second – and perhaps third – will follow.

However, in one respect, the MDGs were not ambitious at all. The first MDG aimed to reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than per capita one dollar a day. This indicator is a shame. Despite well-known differences between poverty lines in different countries and different ways to estimate subsistence levels, nowhere can people enjoy a decent life at a dollar a day (or, at the updated level of $1.25) and expect that this will provide them with the resources to sustain that level. The indicator has clearly been chosen in order to ensure that the goal would be met. The selection of the other goals demonstrated more ambition. They better reflect the quality of life. Though income growth would contribute to their attainment, the MDG action program did not make realization of the other MDGs dependent on the dollar-a-day income growth performance. One could even say, following the argument above, that the opposite is true: income growth targets should be derived from the other goals. Income targets should stand for the resources necessary to meet a person's basic needs with regard to education, health, shelter, drinking water and sanitation, and to improve his or her living conditions sustainably. In all countries on a per capita basis, this definitely would require more than a few dollars a day.

Fourth, meeting the MDGs was seen as obliging each country to allocate resources at its disposal toward poverty reduction. Budgetary resources, natural resources, energy resources, capital, land, research, and technology, infrastructure investment, and other domestic resources can be

used for many purposes – growth, modernization, national security, and other priorities – but from now on, poverty reduction should come first. Mobilizing domestic resources for poverty reduction should not be made dependent on receiving foreign aid. Poverty reduction is each individual country's obligation, irrespective of the aid received. This is the message of the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs. By endorsing MDG 8, the other countries have committed themselves to join a global partnership for development, and to support the poorer countries. But the latter would not be absolved from their obligation toward the other MDGs if foreign aid would not come about. The Millennium Declaration does not stipulate that countries would only be obliged to use domestic resources in order to meet the MDGs if and when they would receive adequate support from outside. On the contrary, from 2000 onwards, all countries must give a first call for the abatement of poverty. Each country should consider other objectives as second-priority goals, after poverty reduction.

Fifth, this commitment has been expressed in unconditional terms. We saw above that the philosophy behind the Millennium Declaration implies that neither low economic growth, nor inadequate foreign assistance can be considered an excuse to be remiss. This applies to other possible excuses as well. Governments, when asked why poverty persists, may be inclined to point at, for instance, adverse terms of trade, or climate change, desertification, and civil war. However, governments, having signed the Millennium Declaration, have no excuse whatsoever for renouncing the pledge to spare no effort to meet the MDGs. On the contrary, especially in situations of declining export incomes, climate change, soil depletion, drought or armed domestic conflict, the poor are the most vulnerable. They will suffer first. The worse the circumstances, the more the weakest and poorest population strata should be taken care of. In such situations, it is all the more important to give priority, first and foremost, to poverty reduction and to protection of the poorest and most vulnerable people. Also in this respect, the Millennium Declaration meant a clean sweep, a radical overhaul of the paradigms which had guided policy-makers and regimes during the twentieth century.

Sixth, the MDGs concern all countries. They were set for the world as a whole, not only for so-called developing countries, but for all other countries as well. This does not only mean that other countries must commit themselves to meet MDG 8, which requires cooperation to establish a global partnership in trade and finance to the benefit of their weaker partners. Because the MDGs are an essential ingredient of the Millennium Declaration, and because both this Declaration and the Goals have been designed with a global reach, also Northern countries are obliged to spare no efforts to reduce poverty. For governments of these countries, in particular the economies in the West, this implied that economic policies should at least not result in an increase of poverty amongst their citizens. As Kofi Annan had written in his *We the Peoples*: 'The central challenge we face today is to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for all the world's people'. These very words were also brought into the Millennium Declaration. In the following sentence, governments committed themselves to changing the character of globalization, because 'at present its benefits are very unevenly shared, while its costs are unevenly distributed'. Because on the world market national frontiers are fading away, alongside people in the South, also people in the North can suffer the costs, instead of enjoying the benefits. Globalization is another reason to interpret the MDGs as truly global targets, rather than just another set of twentieth-century traditional development assistance goals.

Seventh, and finally, the MDGs, as they had been defined and elaborated in international policy documents – notably in the UNDP Human Development Report 2003 – are the same for all countries, but only as far as they are goals. How to reach the goals, with what type of policy instruments, has been left to each individual country. The new consensus implied that countries would be held accountable for accomplishing the goals, but the choice of the instruments would remain at their discretion. Is this a weakness? No, it is a strong point. In the past,

too often, international policy coordination for development had resulted in uniform models, for all countries alike, irrespective of specific circumstances. This had led to straitjacket approaches, such as Bretton Woods-inspired adjustment policies and Poverty Reduction Strategies. These had been criticized, rightly so, because differences between specific situations and conditions of countries were hardly taken into consideration. Moreover, these approaches were more or less imposed from outside. They had to be implemented, under penalty of withdrawal of foreign support. The Millennium Declaration and the MDGs implied a farewell to all of this.

These are seven strong points and virtues of an approach which, to the letter of the text, implied a breakthrough. Whether all political leaders were indeed aware of the consequences of what they had subscribed to is another matter. However, such was the spirit at the turn of the millennia; this is how those agreed wordings were meant, and how they should be read.

Post 2000

Fifteen years later, we cannot but admit that, apart from the MDGs, the Millennium Declaration has become a dead letter. Nobody talks about the Declaration anymore. The MDGs have been discussed widely, but the discussion took place in technical, a-political terms. The spirit which prevailed at the turn of the centuries has died. The values and principles which had been written down in the high-pitched declaration and action program for the new Millennium have been eroded deeply. The objectives of Agenda 21 have been pushed aside.

The brutal attack on New York in 2001 brought a final end to the optimism of the early post-1989 years, which had perked up again a decade later. The fear of widespread terrorism led to a general embrace of the value of security. In the view of opinion leaders and policy-makers, security became a condition which should be achieved before anything else. As long as security would not be guaranteed, the other values could not be realized. Security increasingly was defined in terms of national security and home security. According to this line of reasoning, security could be assured also by attacking possible enemies. Soon after the beginning of the new century, the preemptive strike became accepted as a legitimate step in a policy to defend a group, tribe or country. Violence and counter violence increased. War has become an option again.

The response to terrorism after the turn of the centuries undermined procedures and principles of the United Nations. The topical value of the principles of the United Nations was considered of less significance. Bypassing decision-making procedures within the system became easy. Because big powers gave the example, small countries could do the same and get away with it. Fifteen years of violence have followed: first in Iraq and Afghanistan, later also elsewhere, for instance, in Pakistan, Syria, Yemen, and Libya. In other countries, such as Sudan, Congo, and Somalia and between Israel and Palestine violence, which had been rampant already, continued and intensified – unchecked. In nearly all other African countries, new instabilities and violence emerged: Nigeria, Mali, Ivory Coast, Mauretania, Guinea Bissau, the Central African Republic, and Chad. In other countries, regimes in power sought to oppress opposition with dictatorial means, brutally violating human rights: Egypt, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Eritrea, Zimbabwe, and Venezuela. Other countries – in the Caucasus and in Central America, and Mexico – became the victim of international violent crime that corrupts regimes and erodes democracy and human rights.

Domestic and international conflicts have become more and more complex. Conflicts which had manifested themselves as mainly economic, political, religious, tribal, ethnic, cultural, or sectarian, soon got many of these characteristics simultaneously. Managing complex conflicts within a country became increasingly difficult the longer the conflict lasted. Globalization resulted in blurring the distinction between domestic and international conflicts. Sooner and easier than

before, conflicts originating in one specific country could spread to other parts of the world. Diasporas and the confrontation between radical wings of Islam and Western cultures played their roles, as did the shadow banks, arms trade, and transnational commercial interests that accompanied them.

Geopolitics played a role as well. Recently, the tension between countries of East and West sharply increased. The positive spirit of cooperation that characterized the years following the end of the Cold War no longer holds between, on the one hand, Russia and the other countries of the former Soviet Union, and, on the other hand, Europe and the USA. Confrontation is on the rise. Countries are building up arms. A possible use of nuclear arms is no longer categorically excluded. Political disputes within Europe can again lead to military confrontations, like in Ukraine and the Crimea. So far, the worsening climate between East West has not led to new confrontations in other parts of the world that echo the struggle for spheres of influence during the Cold War. However, it has resulted in a paralysis of global UN-based diplomacy. The escalation of violence throughout the Middle East, which is endangering peace in Europe, Africa and Asia, would urgently require common action on the basis of principles which had been confirmed in the Millennium Declaration. However, also in this respect, world political leaders seem to be unable or unwilling to stem the tide.

All these events reflected regress rather than the progress foreseen in the Millennium Declaration. Similar U-turns took place in other fields. The Kyoto Protocol, meant to check climate change, got buried after ratification. The financial crisis of 2008 onwards was a victory for private commercial motivations – profit and greed – over public, social and human values. Globalization, far from becoming a positive force for all the world's people, resulted in even greater inequality of the sharing of its benefits and costs. Since the beginning of the new century, capitalism has become more brutal than before. While capital continues to accumulate very unequally, in the past, it sought profitable investment opportunities in the real economy, which could result in an increase of material welfare and employment – though, again, unequally distributed. Nowadays, global capital is circulating mainly in the financial sphere, seeking to make money with money through speculative short-term transactions, destabilizing economies and nations. In the system of financial capitalism, land, buildings, houses, real estate in general, resources, commodities, and even food, are losing significance as assets in the real economy, meant to increase production and welfare. Instead, they become mere financial assets, meant to be traded and exchanged for other financial commodities.

Above, I have described the 1980s as a decade of standstill and paralysis, and the 1990s as a period of progress toward sustainable development, be it too slight and too slow. During those years, we seemed to run into the right direction, but we were running behind facts, in particular the facts created by globalization. Since the beginning of the new century, however, we have been running in the opposite direction, increasing the gap between promises and practices wider than ever.

The most worrying are not the economic, political and environmental risks and threats to world stability and welfare mentioned above. The most worrying fact is the gradual dismantling of the international institutions that had been created to address such dangers. After 2001, the year in which the USA invaded Iraq, thereby bypassing the Security Council, the multilateral system has become weaker and weaker. Once agreed international values and principles have been eroded. UN institutions have lost authority as well as resources. UN procedures are being circumvented, resolutions have become hollow paragraphs, decisions empty words, without sanctions on violation or non-implementation. Throughout the world, people have lost confidence in political leaders, in international institutions and procedures, and also in the capability of a global democratic public system as countervailing force to both national powers and transnational commercial interests. Future risks are at least as great as during the first half of the twentieth century: world

social and economic inequalities, instabilities and crises; mass poverties; scarcity of resources; climate change; violent confrontation within and between countries; another world war, and self-annihilation due to the use of weapons of mass destruction. The system of the United Nations had been established in order to jointly address these and other dangers. Using that system, applying agreed procedures on the basis of common values, and acting collectively, the world community has been able to defy many dangers. It did not always result in solutions, but de-escalation was often accomplished. Post 2015, this is even more necessary than post 1945.

Post 2015

Not everything has gone wrong. Within the UN, there are some positive developments. One of those is the acceptance, by consensus, of a new principle: the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). The principle is meant to be applied when in situations of conflict, violence is used against civilians. Though implementation so far has been disappointing, the principle can serve as a yardstick and as a basis for appeal against, for instance, mass violation of human rights of minorities. Its use could also be extended to other fields. It could, for instance, help to protect vulnerable groups that fall victim to harsh economic policies. It thus could serve as a meaningful complement of the MDGs.

The most promising development of the last decade concerns the MDGs themselves. During the fifteen-year term allotted to these goals, they have not been met throughout, anyway not by all countries and fully. However, greater progress has been achieved than skeptics had expected. Perhaps even more important is the fact that the way in which these goals had been designed and monitored, and the discussions within the UN about the follow-up as part of a global Post-2015 Agenda, have strengthened the authority of the United Nations in the field of development. In the longer run, this might help the UN regain such authority also in other fields, such as climate, security, and globalization.

Further efforts in order to fully implement the MDGs, as soon as possible after 2015, should be a first item on a Post-2015 Agenda. Thereby, a number of lessons learned during the first period should be put into practice. Though the definition of the goals does not have to be changed, the manner in which their implementation has been put in hand should be improved. Vandemoortele, one of the members of the team which had designed the MDGs, has criticized policies leading to 'dollarization' and 'donorization' (his terminology) of the MDGs. Money and donors got the upper hand. In policy-making, much attention has been given to MDG 1 (halving the proportion of people whose income is less than $1 a day) at the expense of other goals. In international deliberations, MDG 8 (develop a global partnership for development) stood central, which fostered the wrong idea that the goals first and foremost would require action by foreign partners, rather than the countries themselves. As argued above, neither the Millennium Declaration itself nor the elucidation of the concepts in the Human Development Reports justifies this. In popular conversations and political disputes, there is always a tendency to discuss proxies: income rather than welfare, growth rather than development, and aid rather than cooperation. While proxies can be measured, quantified, and ordered, the categories they stand for represent the value that people attach to the way in which a policy is being carried out, and the contents of the achievements. Up to a point, all MDGs and their sub targets are proxies for human welfare. However, assessments of the goals should not only focus on quantitative and measurable indicators, but especially on the quality of process and progress. Achieving universal primary education means not only that all children are completing school, but also that the quality of their teachers and the education they receive are up to standard. Progress toward greater welfare not only means that fewer people stay poor, but also that they will be empowered and can decide themselves what they want to achieve, and how. Development is not a numbers game. The

Millennium Declaration did not proclaim a numbers exercise. From the very outset, the goals were described in terms of social processes and human agency. However, in the course of policy-making toward their fulfillment, they have become numerical objects of management. The post-2015 Agenda should again highlight quality as essential.

This should not only apply to the yet-unfilled part of the MDGs, but also to the goals still to be set to lift the other half of the world's poor out of unworthy and inhuman circumstances. Next to intensifying efforts to meet the original goals, halving poverty as soon as possible after the initial deadline, the second item on the Global 2015 Agenda should be to cut the other half of poverty to nil, with a new deadline. This will be more difficult. There are reasons why people belong to a poorer second half of the world's poor and why they can be reached less easily, or not at all, with the help of traditional policy instruments. Many of those people cannot be reached with the help of market instruments, because they do not have access to the market. Many cannot be reached with the help of public instruments of the state either, because state authorities are not interested, or have a bias against the communities to which these people belong. From their side, people may have completely lost confidence in public authorities, and in supposedly democratic procedures So, there is a role for civil society, nongovernmental organizations, decentralized communities, community-based institutions and people's movements. Policies addressing this so-called second half of the world's poverty should be based on a thorough analysis of the origins and causes of poverty of specific groups of people: different regions within a country; distinct age groups of men and women; specific cultural, ethnic or national minorities, tribes and indigenous groups; special categories of the rural population and of urban slums, and so on. The poorer people are, the farther they are beyond the reach of the market and the state; the more they have been excluded – or feel excluded – by both the market and the state, the greater the need to tailor anti-poverty policies to the specific circumstances of those people.

This cannot be accomplished without a third agenda item: reduce inequalities between people. Poverty eradication is not possible as long as inequalities persist, or increase. Economic inequality is often defended with the argument that this leads to higher growth, from which also the poor can benefit. This is a fallacy. Inequality would only be in the interest of society as a whole if and when more people would be lifted out of poverty than under conditions of a more equal distribution of income. Growth does not trickle down. The fruits of growth will not be distributed equally and fairly. In particular, the poorest of the poor will not benefit from higher growth under conditions of inequality. An unequal distribution of income, wealth, capital, resources and other means to increase welfare implies inequality of power. This includes the power to keep other people poor, to oppress them, to deny them access to the market and to silence their voices. In many countries, democracy, based on the principle of the inherent equality of men and meant to ensure a level playing field for political decision-making, is thwarted by the abuse of power, that stems from economic inequality.

This third item on the agenda is crucial. Not only poverty eradication, but also sustainable development demands a reduction of inequalities. The economic growth of the previous decades, if continued, together with further climate change, will lead to more scarcity of resources, and a scramble for access to resources abroad. Incessant and unbridled global financial capitalism can be expected to result in economic and political instability in many parts of the world, and increasing social vulnerability. The Post-2015 Global Agenda should therefore address interlinkages between scarcity, instability, vulnerability and inequality. If we fail to do so, people who presently live below subsistence level, or just above, will suffer even more.

In the past, systems were also characterized by inequality. In the nineteenth century, capitalism led to exploitation of people, keeping them poor in the economy and down in society. In the twentieth century, this was altered by decolonization, build-up of welfare states, spread of democracy, and extension of public services. However, globalization and market neoliberalism led to

new inequalities: excluding people from participation in the market and depriving them of the means to get access to the system – to finance, technology and resources. Exclusion followed exploitation: from keeping people down to keeping them out. The most recent phase of capitalism is also most brutal now. As argued by Saskia Sassen, financial capitalism leads to expulsion. It is pushing people out, while occupying the resources they were using to earn a livelihood. The system takes away their land, homes, and habitat. It is depriving them of jobs, employment opportunities, worker's rights, social rights and welfare services. Small farmers and petty business owners are being driven to the margin of the market, and across. From exclusion to expulsion; from a culture of stay away to go away.

So, this should be a fourth item for the Global Agenda Post 2015: the system itself has to be changed. The Agenda should not only deal with objectives, goal, policies and instruments, but also with institutions, decision procedures, binding commitments, rules of law, compliance regulations, and sanctions. They should be based on the agreed values and principles of Agenda 21 and the Millennium Declaration. They may have to be reviewed, updated and actualized, but once reconfirmed, they should not serve as a mantra, disguising non-action, or as a smokescreen for reverse movement.

Reform of the system has been proposed many times. In the 1980s, the proposals of the joint group of developing countries G77 to establish a NIEO did not fall on fertile ground. Reform of the UN itself met with resistance from the early constituents. New institutions have been created, outside the realm of the UN, in order to give more weight to emerging economies and new powers, or to simply avoid rules and value-based decision procedures which once had been agreed by consensus and laid down in international law (as is the case of the G7). The connection with agreed global values is getting loose, and the connection with people's aspirations quite distant.

Agreeing on new and far-reaching Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), not instead of the MDGs, but beyond them, could be a step into the direction of systemic change. The proposal to introduce SDGs was launched at the Rio + 20 conference in 2012. Since then, they have become a centerpiece of the discussion about the post-2015 agenda. The selection and definition of the SDGs differ from those for the MDGs, as they are more bottom up, participatory and transparent. Throughout the world, groups have been enabled to display their views, desires, and expectations. They present their objectives and explain the bottlenecks they have to overcome and the constraints they have to meet. In the deliberations, use has been made of new information and communication technology. The actual exchange of views can be followed on line. Never in the past have UN talks been as participatory and transparent as the deliberations about the post-2015 agenda.

It remains to be seen whether the final phase of these deliberations will remain transparent. The ball is in the corner of the politicians now. But world civil society should not withdraw into backyard corridors. The agenda is too important to be left to politicians and governments alone.

SDGs, focusing, for instance, on sustainable industrialization, production and consumption, sustainable use of the oceans, sustainable cities and the combat of climate change will determine the well-being of future generations. However, agreement about SDGs is also crucial for the success of policies to reduce global poverty. Such policies are necessary, but not sufficient, if the policy environment favors unsustainable and unequal conditions in the economy.

The SDGs should be the central element of a new global partnership for development, as was foreseen in MDG 8. This goes far beyond aid. Obstacles to development resulting from an unsustainable environment, such as climate change, cannot be overcome by merely increasing aid. Aid can foster adjustment to obstacles on the road to development. Aid can also help the victims of these obstacles. But softening the effects of obstacles is not enough. The obstacles themselves

must be removed. A new global partnership for development should first and foremost contain policies to dismantle the obstacles for sustainable development and poverty reduction. Implementation of such policies will entail costs and require finance. This should be the main focus of future development cooperation and aid: to change the character of globalization and avoid its negative consequences, as was called for in the Millennium Declaration.

So, a new agenda for the period beyond the year 2015 should differ from the practice of the last 15 years in many respects. Though the Millennium Declaration had heralded an era of sustainability, political practice was dominated by the concept of security.

Security – as the term is traditionally used in the geopolitical context (national security; homeland security) – is based on exclusion: nations and people consider their security endangered by others. Other nations and people feel likewise. These feelings incite to reciprocal action that confirms feelings of insecurity everywhere. A vicious circle of insecurity is the result.

Sustainability, on the other hand, is inclusive. Sustainability requires an awareness of common security: nations and people can consider themselves secure when also others feel themselves secure. Nobody has a reason to fear being attacked. Such mutual feelings of trust create a virtuous circle of security.

Such a virtuous circle is the basis for building a just, sustainable, participatory and peaceful global society in the twenty-first century, as had already been envisaged in publications of the World Council of Churches in the 1970s and in the Earth Charter, long before the adoption of the Millennium Declaration. As against previous agendas, which were simply titled 'Agenda for … ' or 'Declaration', the post-2015 agenda – recently renamed as 'The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' – has been given an ambitious title: 'Transforming Our World'. This title of a document adopted by Heads of State and Heads of Government sounds like a pledge. A pledge to transform is welcome, because business as usual will not lead to a sustainable world. That political leaders at the highest level, gathering together on behalf of 'We the Peoples', declare this 'our world', belonging to all of us, without exception, does offer some hope of fulfillment.

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Disclosure statement