



Montevideo, February 22, 2014

Amina J. Mohammed
Special Advisor of the Secretary-General
on Post-2015 Development Planning

Dr Danny Sriskandarajah
Secretary General
CIVICUS

Dear Ms. Mohammed, dear Danny,

For personal and urgent reasons I had to cancel at the last moment my trip to Istanbul and I will not be able to attend the Istanbul workshop on “Coordinating the global advocacy agenda” to be held this weekend.

I would nevertheless like to share with you some comments on the issues to be discussed at the meeting and I hope that you can distribute this letter to the other participants.

The Istanbul workshop is held just one week after a workshop bringing together several global and regional civil society networks in Montevideo, last February 11 to 13, convened by Social Watch and attended by 30 participants from over 20 countries in five continents.

The Montevideo meeting brought together leaders of key international social and economic justice networks to strategise about our common struggles for economic and gender justice and our common efforts to monitor and hold governments accountable.

The Uruguayan experience: There are many alternatives

Uruguayan president José Mujica addressed our inaugural session and warned against a culture where “only losers talk about ethics in conduct”.

“Productivity and ingenuity have created formidable tools” he added, and yet “frightening concentration of wealth is creating what I call a 'leftover humanity', left behind at the side of the road”. President Mujica described the forces of squandering and wastefulness and the magnitude of the problems of climate change and unrestricted financial speculation with commodities. “The measures that would be needed,” he explained, “would have to be taken, based on scientific evidence, by some world governance body, as no country can cope with these problems alone, even less so the small countries”.

“We need to mitigate as much as we can,” he added, but a “long, tough, political and collective struggle” will be needed to “address the deep causes.”

The meeting participants had an opportunity to learn further from the Uruguayan experience in open dialogue with three ministers. In a moment where inequalities are increasing all around the world,

Uruguay has managed, over the last decade, to dramatically reduce both poverty and inequalities, while at the same time transitioning towards 100% electricity generation from renewable sources before 2020.

“Criminality does not correlate with poverty but with inequities,” stressed Interior minister Eduardo Bonomi. Social Development minister Daniel Olesker described the difference between reducing “recent poverty” which resulted from the financial and economic crisis of 2002 with “deep structural poverty passed from generation to generation.” The availability and improvement of universal health and education services, made possible by economic growth and progressive taxation, addressed the first one, but extreme poverty required a “very well focalized family by family approach”.

Labour minister, doctor José Bayardi described the measures applied to address the crisis: Instead of the “austerity” recommended by multilateral financial institutions, Uruguay implemented emergency cash transfers, active State participation in the economy to promote growth, collective bargaining that resulted in salary increases, enforcement of labour rights among rural and domestic workers. These measures boosted economic growth and, instead of repelling investors, coincided with a peak of foreign greenfield investment. Decent jobs are the only sustainable solution to poverty and to reduce inequalities. In that regard, Uruguay has found that North-South trade tends to reaffirm “center-periphery relations” while value-added products that promote development find better opportunities in South-South relations.

Inspired by this evidence that there are, indeed, viable alternatives to the classical neoliberal formulas, participants from over 20 countries in five continents discussed during the next two days the current state of the conversations on the Rio +20 follow-up and the post-2015 development framework.

Shaping the Future: In plenary and in small groups we discussed the opportunities and challenges of on-going and emerging global processes such as Post-2015, G20, Rio+20, Climate negotiations, Trade-related negotiations (WTO/TPP/investment agreements), new Human Rights mechanisms and the role of civil society, multi-stakeholders processes and public-private “partnerships” in them.

The groups identified the key fora discussing gender justice, climate, poverty and inequalities and, in particular, the “partnerships” being proposed and the changes that they introduce as well the their implications.

We noted with concern how the Global Partnership for Development described in Goal 8 of the MDGs is being changed in the language being used to multiple “partnerships” with big corporations. Goal 8 clearly described the responsibility of developed countries to contribute with aid, fairer trade rules, technologies, and a solution to the external debt problems. The adverse impact of developed countries’ policies and deregulation, such as financial liberalization, on developing countries also underscore the centrality of the Goal 8 partnership.

These promises were not dated and are far from being fulfilled, but at least we knew what to demand and from whom. Now, with the systematic addition of a plural and obviating the capital letter this Partnership is transformed into multiple “partnerships” and they are not any more between rich and poor nations but between governments, multilateral agencies and large multinational corporations. The actors of civil society have certainly a role to play and the expansion of public participation is essential for sustainable development, from the local to the global, but the United Nations is primarily

an intergovernmental forum. This pact between governments risks now to be replaced in practice by "partnerships" with "stakeholders". In the already existing "partnerships" incubated by the United Nations, Coca Cola is a "stakeholder" in promoting women, MasterCard is a "stakeholder" in education and Morgan-Chase Bank in "energy for all".

Last September, the Civil Society Reflection Group on Global Development Perspectives found those multi-stakeholder partnerships problematic as instruments for sustainability as they raise more problems than they solve¹. For example:

- Growing influence of the corporate sector in political discourse and agenda-setting: Partnership initiatives allow corporations and their interest groups undue and unsupervised influence over agenda setting and political decision-making by governments.
- Undermining accountable and transparent multilateralism: The proliferation of partnerships contributes to the continued institutional weakening of the UN system and hinders comprehensive development strategies.
- Weakening democratic public institutions: If partnerships create the equivalence of equal rights among stakeholders, they undermine the political and legal position occupied legitimately by accountable public bodies (governments and parliaments). Given the inequality amongst participating actors, conflicts of interest emerge.
- Unstable financing – a threat to the sufficient provision of public goods: The funding of the Post-2015 Agenda risks becoming increasingly privatized, dependent on voluntary and unpredictable channels of financing through benevolent individuals or private philanthropic foundations. The financial resources committed in the existing partnership initiatives have not been shown to effectively increase available resources.
- Lack of monitoring and accountability mechanisms: No instruments are in place to guarantee that partnerships will be open, transparent, and accountable

The UN has a long tradition in establishing consultation with NGOs, including those that represent business interests, such as the ICC. Last year the General Assembly of the UN did not endorse the creation of a Partnership Facility proposed by the Secretary-General, as the governments (and many civil society organizations) had multiple doubts about its lack of transparency and accountability.

And now the post-2015 process might introduce the legitimization of these “partnerships” by the back door, promoting without proper scrutiny the eruption of corporations in global decision-making, implementation and monitoring. These "partnerships" dilute and weaken the responsibility of States, which are no longer in the center of the action, and they reinforce power asymmetries. Corporations have already acquired through bilateral investment agreements the right to sue states in supranational tribunals (and not through the constitutional justice system) and are now candidates to receive official development assistance and sit in the forums where rules are negotiated, at the expense of national (and popular) sovereignty, democracy and human rights.

At Social Watch, while we actively engage in making governments accountable for their promises, we also firmly believe that States have a unique and leading responsibility in making development happen. If we erode that role and empower corporations instead we are eroding our own possibilities as citizens, since corporations are only accountable to shareholders.

1 The papers can be found at: www.reflectiongroup.org

In sum, we would like our colleagues participating in the Istanbul workshop to consider the following:

1. Joint civil society action around Post-2015 has to focus on goals and commitments for the countries of the North, the necessary changes of the consumption and production patterns in these countries, and the structural framework conditions shaped by these countries, particularly in the global financial, investment and trade systems.
2. Any kind of "MDG plus Agenda" for the poor countries in the global South would reproduce the old development narrative and falls short of the required structural transformation.
3. In understanding diversity as our strength we need to make special efforts to make sure that the voices of the poor and the vulnerable as heard, as well as of grassroots organizations and of those based in the South. A single global civil society campaign does not sound like a good idea and Social Watch has already made its views known about the dangers of "consortia" not based on common principles and objectives but on the pressure of donors. In a moment when the voice of corporations in multilateral debates is gaining predominant attention through different channels, establishing or empowering multi-stakeholder partnerships is not helpful to enhance the visibility and effectiveness of non-profits working for the common good.
4. The UN needs to define and create the function of "lobbyist" for private interests, similar to how different parliaments around the world define lobbyists, different from the role of NGOs that are required to defend the public good. While lobbyists can make meaningful contributions to the debate, strict conflict of interest policies need to be put in place and enforced, to guarantee the integrity of the decision-making processes.
5. Monitoring and accountability mechanisms need to be strengthened and the role of civil society in them encouraged. "Clicktivism" and "crowdsourcing" cannot be a substitute for organized civil society actors. Internet-based questionnaires can be a publicity gimmick but their use as "evidence" is completely unscientific and potentially manipulative.

Yours,

Roberto Bissio

on behalf of the Coordinating Committee of Social Watch