

Democratic Governance, Objectives of Sustainable Development of the Post 2015 Agenda and Official Aid for Development

12/02/2014

Fateh AZZAM

Director of the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship, American University of Beirut. Former Regional Representative for Middle East at Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Lebanon.

Thank you very much for this kind invitation. It's my honor to be here with you.

The questions framed for this conference are very important and provide us with an opportunity to question several standing assumptions and think about different ways of working; because the old ways clearly have not been very successful.

My humble contribution, in 12 minutes, will be in brief bullet points, each of which would take much more than 12 minutes to clarify, but bear with me. In my comments, I rely in part on the accumulated wisdom of international declarations including the Millennium Declaration, the UN Declaration on the Right to Development, the base principles of a human rights-based approach to development, and the draft principles on a human rights-based approach to poverty reduction, which still need to be formally adopted. I also rely in part on the Post-2015 Agenda Declaration by Arab Civil Society Organizations, adopted in Beirut on 14 March 2013, at the regional consultation organized by the Arab NGO Network for Development.

I will focus my remark on a few key points,

1. The problems faced by developing countries (poverty, under or even de-development are not entirely of their own doing, and they are not only technical, but political as well. The global economic and political framework is



Centro de Estudios de Oriente Medio
Fundación Promoción Social de la Cultura

IX CEMOFPS CONFERENCE "The Arab Spring: The Post-2015 Agenda and the Spanish Cooperation for Development"

in large part responsible for the state of global economy. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union this framework has focused on open markets, public and private sector partnership, financial investment, credits and loans, and industry de-regulation. In short: unbridled capitalism. It promotes private sector profits at the expense of social safety nets, "trickle-down" economics where very little trickles down, then it expects international development cooperation to fix the problems of inequities that this creates and to soften its effects. Rhetorical focus on good governance, the human rights-based approach, and the sustainability of development is very good, but implementation of these commitments is weak. The international committee cannot yet make the difficult decisions that are needed where these goals intersect with the standing global economic and political system.

2. With this as context, the Millennium Development Goals presented a set of specific targets to achieve, but ignored global policies that created inequities. A good example is the insistence on intellectual property rights in the area of pharmaceuticals, which have denied access to vital medicines to large parts of the African continent. Another is the rush to attract foreign investment, providing tax havens for Northern companies opening industries in the South. In most of those cases, jobs may be created but little attention was paid to wages that guarantee an adequate standard of living, long-term economic and social security and the minimum standards for social wellbeing. Thus, local vulnerabilities were perpetuated and made even worse. Implementation of the MDGs should not have been left to good intentions and to good-faith international cooperation (Goal 8) and the post-2015 agenda should take a serious look at the patterns and policies that perpetuate poverty, inequality and under-development. It should question the desire to make maximum profit in the short term and balance it against the benefits of long-term sustainable development of national communities.
3. The link between Democracy, Development and Human Rights has to be further clarified and made operational. This linkage has been widely recognized and accepted, but not enough has been done to put it in practice. The Arab region presents a clear case-in-point, where the situation reached untenable proportions and resulted in the popular revolts of early 2011:
 - a. We had exclusive and corrupt governance systems where the elite closest to power held nearly all of the wealth. Those elites were invested in and allied to international capital and investments, and created very narrow circles of privilege at the expense of their citizens



Centro de Estudios de Oriente Medio
Fundación Promoción Social de la Cultura

IX CEMOFPS CONFERENCE "The Arab Spring: The Post-2015 Agenda and the Spanish Cooperation for Development"

- who were almost entirely excluded. Few civil and political rights were respected.
- b. The focus was on growth rather than development. Everyone lauded Tunisia for its 6% and 7% growth rate while regional disparities within the country grew and the gap between rich and poor widened. Few economic and social rights were respected. The story in Egypt was similar.
 - c. Unemployment in many countries in the region reached over 25% for youth in particular, double the global average. What else was left for them but to revolt? It should have come as no surprise.
4. The Declaration on the Right to Development provides a clear framework, where the human person is the object and purpose of development and development is defined as the enjoyment of the full range of human rights: economic, social, cultural, civil and political. The post-2015 agenda is an important opportunity for reaffirming the Declaration and for developing implementation mechanisms.
 5. The rights-based approach requires accountability. In the political or economic spheres, it is not wrong to say that the bigger and more powerful you are the less accountable you are. This is the case both for the national and international levels. In particular, we must ask who holds the multilateral financial institutions accountable? And to what criteria? States should be accountable to their people, and people are accountable to each other in a society under the rule of law, but what about groups of states and the institutions they build for purposes of international economic and political governance: to whom are they accountable, especially when they adopt policies that fail, or worse, that result in de-development? We remember the failed structural adjustment policies, the push towards privatization at any cost, and austerity measures that demand smaller governments which could only be achieved by cutting services to the poor and underprivileged in society. Yet at the same time we see that full freedom is given to the private sector, with ever diminishing obligations. These policies aimed at short-term immediate solutions to long-standing problems, and represent a very narrow and myopic view of the future,
 6. In their March declaration, Arab CSOs called for many things to be included in the post-2015 agenda. I share just a few of them here, and you can always look at ANND's web site for the full statement:



Centro de Estudios de Oriente Medio
Fundación Promoción Social de la Cultura

IX CEMOFPS CONFERENCE
"The Arab Spring: The Post-2015 Agenda and
the Spanish Cooperation for Development"

- a. The adoption of participatory and rights-based methodologies
 - b. A review of the role of the state as the primary protector and guarantor of citizens' rights
 - c. An economic approach that is balanced and aimed at sustainable development rather than economic growth
 - d. A return to developing productive capacities that create sustainable jobs
 - e. Fair and equitable distribution of national resources.
 - f. Equality of men and women in all spheres as essential to development
 - g. A review of global governance and economic structures towards more transparency and accountability
7. Finally, macro-level policies are not enough. Sustainable human development can best be achieved at the local, even family level. Global, national and sub-national policies need to adopt a rights-based, people-centered, participatory and transparent approach. International development cooperation can be most effective when aimed in those directions, and I humbly submit that international aid agencies should also adopt a role of ensuring that global politics are not running counter to these principles.